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COWBOY CHRIS in CINNABAR.

The Battle for the Blue Jeans.

By Wm. West Wilder.



MARTIN WYNDER STARED AT THE AWFUL APPARITION, HIS HEART ALMOST CEASING TO BEAT.

Cowboy Chris in Cinnabar;

OR,

The Battle for the Blue Jeans.

BY WM. WEST WILDER,

("WYOMING WILL,")

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CHAPTER I.

TWO COWBOY PARDS.

WHILE still several miles from Cinnabar City, the regular stage was stopped in Cross-cut Canyon by three masked and mounted men. Although this was something quite out of the usual order of things, the driver pulled up promptly when he heard the command to halt and saw the three men blocking the trail with leveled weapons.

"Hold hard an' stiddy, Johnny!" commanded one of the men, who appeared to be the leader. "Jest keep your level, ef you know w'en you're well off. This is a case of business, an' we won't detain ye long."

The veteran Jehu growled out some unintelligible reply, but he was too wise to attempt running the gantlet in the face of those cocked and leveled weapons.

Revolver in hand, the leader rode up to the door of the stage and peered in.

"Easy thar!" he sharply cried, turning the muzzle of the revolver on the only male passenger, a little man in gray, who was nervously fumbling in his pocket after a weapon. "Keep yer ham' off ther barker, ef ye don't want er through ticket ter Glory."

The little man fell back with a gasp and glared despairingly at the bold bandit.

"You are not the game I am arter," declared the mask, and his eyes left the male passenger to turn upon the two ladies within the stage. "This yere's not a case of yer money or yer life, it's quite diffrent biz. Madam," lifting his hat with his free hand and bowing to the elder of the ladies, a woman of fifty, attired in deep mourning, "hev I ther honor of addressin' Mrs. George Newman?"

"You have, sir," calmly replied the lady.

"And thet is your daughter?" nodding toward the beautiful girl at the lady's side. "You are the people I am lookin' fer, so you will please be kind ernough ter step outside ther stage."

The lady started as if to obey, but the girl caught her arm and drew her back. Her dark eyes flashed, as she faced the masked man and demanded:

"Why should we get out? What right have you to ask such a thing of us?"

The outlaw laughed.

"The right of might," was the reply. "You sh'd see thet, young lady."

"I do not see it."

The mask made an impatient gesture.

"I hain't got any time ter fool erway," he asserted, "so you will jest git out of thar ter once, or I'll call one of ther boys ter snake ye out. Ef you don't want ter git handled rough, you kin tumble out of your own accord."

The beautiful girl glared angrily at him, her eyes flashing in a manner that would have made most men quail.

"Coward!" burst from her red lips.

"Are you goin' ter git out?"

"We had better obey, Grace, my child," urged the elder woman. "It is the most sensible thing we can do."

"But this is outrageous!" flashed the girl, darting something like a scornful glance at the little man in gray, who sat shivering and white-faced in one corner. "If I were a man—"

"You w'd make a fool of yerself," was the mask's rude interposition. "I am not a man ter be trifled with, as you'll—"

His words were cut short by a cry from one of his men, which was answered at a distance by a ringing yell that made the canyon echo.

"Yip, yip, yip!"

It was the regular cowboy yell, and a glance showed the leader of the masked men that two mounted cattlemen were charging straight down toward the halted stage.

With a snarl of rage, he discharged his revolver toward the oncoming cowboys, and, at the same moment, one of his men sent a rifle-bullet whistling toward the daring riders.

One of the cowboys' horses was seen to stagger a moment, as if hard hit, then the two dar-

ing fellows came on as before, one being a bit in advance. Their bridle-reins were held in their teeth, and revolvers glittered in their hands, although as yet they had not fired a shot.

The road-agents, seized by sudden terror, wheeled their horses, and spurred madly down the canyon.

The stage-driver would have taken a hand and sent a few bullets after the fleeing desperadoes, but his horses had been alarmed and he had his hands full to manage them. The intervening stage prevented the cowboys from opening fire on the baffled ruffians.

The little man within the stage succeeded in getting out a small 22-caliber revolver. Thrusting his head out of the window, he fired every chamber of the weapon toward the approaching cattlemen, believing in his excitement they were the fleeing outlaws. Fortunately, neither the men nor their animals were touched by the fusillade.

But one of the cowboys' horses had been hit by the single rifle-bullet fired by the road-agents. The handsome young fellow who bestrode the animal realized the creature was hard hit, and thrust his weapons into their holsters, gathering up the reins in his hands, crying to his mate:

"The old horse has got it for good, Rube!"

The other, a small, wizened old fellow with a weather-beaten face, vouchsafed no reply, but an angry glitter leaped into his keen little eyes.

However, when the passenger in gray opened on them from the stage window, the small cowboy said something.

"Dern a fool!" he gritted, bending low in the saddle and half-lifting a revolver, as if to return the shots.

The one whose horse had been hit freed his feet from the stirrups and prepared to leap if the animal fell. It was well he did, for, just before the stage was reached, the creature stumbled and pitched headlong to the ground.

The nimble young cowboy alighted fairly on his feet, and his companion instantly reined up, growling:

"Blame ther beastly luck! A good hoss gone ter thunder, an' ther pesky varmints as sent it thar hev got clean off!"

The younger man said nothing, but turned back toward the fallen animal. He was a handsome, manly-looking youth, the perfect contour of his fine figure being well-displayed by an attire that was somewhat fanciful for one of his calling. There was a look of mingled rage and sadness on his shapely face as he bent over the faithful black horse that had been his companion through many a wild and exciting ride.

A glance showed the young man that the horse was fatally injured. It tried to arise and about half-succeeded, but fell back with something like a human groan of pain, turning its great eyes appealingly upon its young master.

"Poor fellow—poor boy!" and the cowboy's hand caressed the velvet muzzle of the heavily breathing animal, while tears stood in his honest eyes. "I had rather lost a hand! But, you shail not remain unavenged, old pony! I will yet find the fellow who fired that shot and call him to an account. He shall pay dearly for your life!"

"Best shoot him, pard," asserted the wizened cowboy. "Thet'll putt him outer his misery."

But the other shook his head.

"I can't do it," he declared. "If it must be done, you will have to do the job, Rube."

"I know how ye feel, Chris. Jest you git erway, an' I'll finish his sufferin'."

The horse lifted its nose with a faint whinny, that cut its young master's heart like a knife.

"Poor boy!" he almost sobbed, shuddering as he saw the blood gushing from the wound in the animal's breast. "Good-by, old fellow, good-by!"

With a parting caress he turned away, noticing the heavy revolver that gleamed in his comrade's hand. As he walked slowly toward the stage, he was followed by the pitiful gaze of the doomed creature's eyes—a look which seemed to ask as plainly as words, why he was being deserted just then.

The older cowboy had swung himself down from the saddle, and once upon his feet, it was seen he was wonderfully bow-legged. There was no show of finery about his plain attire, but he had the aspect of a man inured to hardships, and used to wild life and stirring scenes.

Retaining a firm grasp on the bridle of his own horse, the bow-legged cowboy advanced toward his comrade's wounded animal. There was a hard look on his weather-tanned face, as if he had steeled himself for the duty he was about to perform.

The younger cowboy did not look back, but in his mind he saw the picture of his companion

bending forward to touch the revolver's muzzle⁹ against the head of the unfortunate horse—and—

Crack! crack!

Two muffled reports, which sounded almost as one, and he knew the deed was done. Never again would the gallant horse bear a rider, as, with arched neck, glowing eye and proudly-flowing mane and tail, it joined in the blood-stirring excitement of the round-up, or flew across the plain in pursuit of a stampeded herd.

The young man dashed his hand across his eyes, and, as the mist which had gathered was thus brushed away, he found himself face to face with a beautiful girl, who was sympathetically regarding him from the open window of the stage door.

The next moment he was bowing before her with true cowboy chivalry, his head uncovered, the broad-brimmed sombrero clasped in his left hand.

CHAPTER II.

GRACE.

"Oh, it is too bad!" cried the girl, impulsively. "I am so sorry!"

The young cowboy actually blushed, for no matter how noble a certain amount of tender-heartedness is in a man, he does not like to be seen with tears in his eyes, and the sympathy of a woman on such an occasion is like gall and wormwood.

The girl saw how confused her words had made the young man, and she hastened to add:

"The poor horse! From the window I saw him when he fell. Did it injure him so much it was necessary to shoot him?"

"He was shot before that, miss," was the reply. "One of those road-agents spotted him with a rifle-bullet; that was why he fell."

"Such a handsome animal! What a wretch it must have been who shot him!"

The cowboy smiled.

"Without doubt the man is a pretty hard case," he agreed, "for the bullet was probably intended for me instead of the horse. But my pard and myself were fortunate enough to save you from robbery—were we?"

"From worse than robbery, I think. The horrid wretch who came to the door was about to compel mother and myself to leave the stage, while this gentleman"—nodding toward the little man in gray, who had drawn back into a corner—"was to remain in the coach."

Something like a scowl marked the young man's face for a moment.

"Almost a case of kidnapping, I should think. If that is true, we were fortunate indeed in being on hand."

"We are the fortunate ones; you were unfortunate enough to lose a noble horse. Whom are we to thank for our escape?"

"No one, miss. Both my pard and myself are plain men, and the thanks of a lady would embarrass us. We were glad of an opportunity to chip into the game, for we have struck nothing in the way of excitement during the last two days. As we find it almost impossible to exist without excitement, you can imagine how delighted we were when we saw the chance to take a hand in a little game of this kind. We embraced the opportunity with great rejoicing."

"But you must allow us to thank you," insisted the girl, with a charming smile. "And I trust that you will tell us your names?"

"I will do that certainly. The name of my pard is Reuben Randall, but he is usually called Round-up Rube. He is a man familiar with every crook and turn of cowboy life and is as true a friend as ever breathed."

"You forget yourself."

"I am Christopher Comstock, sometimes called Cowboy Chris."

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Comstock," declared the girl, holding out a shapely gloved hand. "I am Grace Newman, and this is my mother. We are going to Cinnabar City."

Chris accepted the offered hand, and Mrs. Newman was also eager to shake hands with him.

"We are proud of the honor of touching the hand of a brave man," she said, at which the modest young fellow blushed again. "Won't you bring your friend forward?"

"I fear you have asked too much of me," smiled Chris. "Rube is very bashful in the presence of ladies, and I think it would take a pair of horses to drag him up to the stage if he knew I meditated introducing him to any of the fair sex."

"Oh, but he shall not escape!" asserted Grace.

"I will speak to him."

Rube had removed the saddle and trappings from the dead horse, and was bringing them to—

ward the stage, when he was suddenly confronted by the charming girl.

"Oh, Mr. Randall!" she cried; "I want to thank you."

"Gug-gug-great smokel!" stammered the old fellow. "Fer w'at?"

"For saving us from those dreadful men."

"Never done it!" protested the bow-legged cowboy. "It wuz Chris; you kin thank him. Don't thank me—fer goodness sake *don't!*"

"Oh, but I have thanked him for his part, and now I will thank you for yours. I would shake hands with you, but I see you have both hands full."

"Thet's so," admitted Rube; "an' thet's w'y I hain't got this hat off. I hope you won't think I mean ary leetle bit o' disrespec' 'cause I didn't take off my hat."

"Oh, no! not at all. Won't you come to the door and permit mother to thank you?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Rube, turning pale and appearing on the point of taking flight. "Ernother shemal!"

"No one but my mother."

"Well, you'll hev ter 'scuse me. I'm in a terrible hurry. You kin jest take thet boy o' mine in thar with ye an' thank him all ther way ter Cinnabar. He hain't got no boss ter ride, an' so he'll hev ter go on ther hearse."

As quickly as possible, the old fellow escaped from the laughing eyes of the girl, but he actually felt weaker than he would if he had been facing half a dozen foes.

"Hey, driver!" he called; "jest take this saddle up thar with ye an' tote it ter Cinnabar fer us."

"I'll do it, ole man," was the driver's reply; "fer you an' yer pard chipped in at ther right time. I reckon ther company's in debt ter ye fer thet."

Although Chris tried to escape from Grace and ride with the driver, he was not successful, as both Mrs. Newman and her daughter insisted that he should ride within the coach. With a farewell glance toward his dead horse, he entered.

"I shall send some one out from Cinnabar to bury him," he declared.

Once more the stage rolled on, the driver cracking his long whip and yelling as if nothing had happened. Round-up Rube galloped on close behind.

"Do you belong in Cinnabar?" asked Mrs. Newman of Chris.

The young cowboy shook his head slightly.

"Both my pard and myself will be strangers in the town," was his reply.

"And we shall be in the same predicament," replied Grace, a sad look falling upon her fair young face.

"We are going there on business and to visit my husband's grave," explained the widow.

And the girl sighed:

"Poor papa!"

The cowboy's curiosity was touched, but he asked no questions. However, Mrs. Newman saw fit to explain.

"My husband was in business there. He was the principal owner of the Blue Jeans Mine. At least, I supposed he was the principal owner, but since Mr. Newman's death, a man has appeared who claims to be sole owner. I intend to thoroughly investigate his claim, for I believe there is something crooked about it."

"Very likely," returned Chris, by the way of saying something.

"Oh, I am sure he is a scoundrel!" vehemently asserted Grace. "Father scarcely ever mentioned him in his letters."

"Who is this man?"

"One Martin Wynder."

"Was he interested in the mine before Mr. Newman's death?"

"He was in some way, although I cannot understand exactly how. In all but one of Mr. Newman's letters I was impressed with the belief that my husband was the principal or sole owner of the Blue Jeans Mine. There was, however, one letter which sounded strangely unlike him, and, but for the handwriting, I should have pronounced it a forgery. In that he spoke of Martin Wynder as his partner and friend."

"You are sure the letter was not a forgery?"

"It could not have been. I have been familiar with Mr. Newman's writing for years, and the letter was certainly in his hand. There is no one living who could have forged a letter in which I could not have detected one slip."

"Then there must have been something in his statement that this Wynder was his partner."

"Unless the letter was written under compulsion."

"You had other letters afterwards?"

"Yes."

"He made no mention of being compelled to write the letter you speak of?"

"No."

"Then it hardly seems possible he was compelled to do so."

"You are right. Still there is something about that letter I am not able to understand. Since Mr. Newman's death, I have read it over fifty times, at least, and it sounds stranger every time. The language is not like that used by my husband—or, properly speaking, I should say the phraseology is not like his. In everything but the writing, it is as if a stranger had written the letter and tried to write as he imagined a husband would write to his wife."

"That is strange."

"It certainly is strange. There is something about it I cannot understand. Since Mr. Newman's death, this Wynder has come forward and laid claim to the mine, producing papers to prove his right. He is in possession now."

"But we will turn him out!" declared Grace, her dark eyes flashing. "He will find he cannot cheat us, even though we are not men!"

"I admire your courage," said Chris; "and I sincerely hope you will be successful."

"Thank you."

"Did this Wynder know when you started for Cinnabar?"

"I notified him I was coming," replied Mrs. Newman.

"And you say you believe those road-agents meant to kidnap you?"

"It looked that way. Surely they had no notion of robbing the stage, and one of them asked if I was Mrs. Newman."

A sudden light broke across the young cowboy's face.

"That settles it!" he exclaimed.

"Settles what?"

"The fact that this Wynder is a fraud and is playing some crooked game for the mine."

"What caused you to so suddenly agree with me?"

"The fact that those men plainly meant to kidnap you and your daughter. They were probably hired tools of this Wynder, who meant to prevent your appearance in Cinnabar. He hired them to stop the stage and get away with you. Indeed, it may have been Wynder, himself!"

"I believe Mr. Comstock is right, mother!" cried Grace.

"I did not think of that before," confessed the widow; "but it certainly looks reasonable."

"Wynder must be a desperate man," declared Chris. "He has possession of the mine, and in this country possession is nine points of law."

"We will make him get out pretty quick," asserted the girl. "We will find plenty of men to stand by us when they see we are right."

"That is true," asserted the cowboy; "and you can depend on my pard and myself. I am ready to see you through to the end, and Rube will stick by me through thick and thin."

"It is a bargain!" exclaimed Grace. "We can not ask for better backers, and if you stay by us, you shall not lose anything. Let's shake hands over it."

For a second time Cowboy Chris accepted that warm gloved hand, and thus the compact was sealed.

CHAPTER III.

WYNDER'S TOOL STRIKES A SNAG.

INTO Cinnabar rode Martin Wynder, mounted on a foam-flecked horse. Straight to the Blue Jeans Mine he made his way. Giving the horse to the care of an employee, he entered the office, venting a burst of wrath the moment the door was closed behind his back.

"Such beastly luck I never saw before!" he snarled, dashing his hat upon the floor then kicking it clean across the office, where it landed on a bit of fresh writing from the bookkeeper's pen.

"I will not be responsible for that smooch, Mr. Wynder," declared the rather effeminate-looking young man, as he removed the hat and gazed helplessly at the marred page.

"Blow the smooch!"

"I would, sir, if it would do any good."

"Dustin, you're a fool!"

"Thank you, sir."

The meekness of the young man was something little short of distressing.

Wynder stood twitching savagely at his black beard and glaring at the unoffending bookkeeper as if he would devour the little fellow.

"I wish you had a little more sand," cried the self-proclaimed owner of the Blue Jeans Mine. "I know I can trust you, Dustin, and you have been a great aid to me in my schemes. If you

only had a little more sand, you would be an invaluable assistant."

"But, it is a distressing fact that I am a coward," confessed the bookkeeper, with a sad shake of his head, one thin, white hand gently caressing his silky mustache. "I do not suppose I can help it, for I am built that way."

"If you only had the grit to serve me as I like, you should have an interest in the mine."

"I fear I shall have to remain contented with my present wages, Mr. Wynder."

The black-bearded man began to pace the floor, his hands clinched and his forehead wrinkled by a savage scowl. The bookkeeper watched him from the corner of his eyes.

"It was a complete failure," muttered Wynder, seeming to have forgotten the presence of another in the room. "The women will be in Cinnabar in less than half an hour, then the battle will begin in earnest. But for those infernal cowboys, my scheme would have succeeded, desperate though it was. They had to appear at the very moment when everything was in my hands. Well, I have possession of the mine, and if I am not able to hold it, it will be my fault."

"So you did not succeed in capturing the ladies?"

It was the bookkeeper who spoke, and Martin turned like a flash.

"What's that?" he snapped, his eyes glowing.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing!" hastily stammered the young man, his eyes falling before the glare of the other's.

With three strides, Wynder was at the desk, and his hand fell on Howard Dustin's shoulder.

"What—did—you—say?"

The bookkeeper shrunk beneath that touch, beginning to stammer a reply.

"Hold on," interrupted Wynder. "Don't lie! You must be a mind-reader, Dustin, for I certainly told you nothing of my plans. This is not the first time you have been aware of my moves. By what means you obtain the knowledge I cannot say."

"No, I did not succeed in capturing the ladies, but I should have been successful had not two cowboys chipped into the game. We were obliged to give it up as a bad job, and Newman's wife and child will be in Cinnabar before long. Then the fight for the mine will begin, and I hold the winning cards."

"I think you do, sir," agreed Dustin.

"If not, I will steal some more from the pack—with your aid."

"You can depend on me."

"I believe it. You will lose nothing by serving me."

"You have always paid me well, sir."

"But, I am going to do still better by you. I do not know why it is, but I have taken a liking to you, Dustin. Your face seems to remind me of some one I have known in the past, though I cannot tell just who that some one was. You are handy with the pen, and may be able to aid me in getting up some papers to use in this case. If I only knew what became of Newman's papers I would be all right; but I am sure they are not in possession of his wife. They were probably hidden; in which case, it is very doubtful if they ever come to the light of day."

"But if they should turn up—what?"

"I would have to gain possession of them and destroy them."

"That would be the only way to hold the mine?"

"No; but that would be the better way. I can hold it by the virtue of possession and forged papers. But something tells me it is going to be a stern fight. I feel as if those cowboys who balked me to-day are going to become stumbling-blocks in my path. I shall have to see to it that they are disposed of, providing they stop in Cinnabar."

Wynder resumed walking the floor, and the bookkeeper bent over his work once more. Suddenly the plotter seized his hat and left the office.

"I will be on hand to see the stage come in," he said, as he hurried toward the Washington Hotel. "I must receive Mrs. Newman cordially."

When he reached the hotel he was surprised to notice a big, broad-shouldered and bewhiskered fellow among the crowd of loafers, awaiting the arrival of the stage. He caught the big man's eye, and the latter followed Wynder into the building.

"You must have made good time, Dolby," said the plotter, speaking in a cautious tone and making sure there was no one near to overhear their talk.

"You bet yer boots I did, boss!" was the reply.

"Where is Pat?"

"We separated, an' he struck roun' by Devil's Rock."

"Good! That will make all three of us come in by different roads. We shall not be suspected."

"I reckon not."

"There's work ahead, Mat."

"Ther more ther better, so long's thar's rocks in it."

"Those cowboys—"

"Dern 'em!"

"If they stop in Cinnabar, they must be downed."

"Will it pay?"

"I will make it pay. I will give a hundred dollars each to have them disposed of."

"I'm your huckleberry!"

"You will take the job?"

"You're shoutin'."

"Good! The quicker you down them the better I will be pleased."

"I'll jump 'em ter oncet."

"You must look out and do it in such a manner that ther boys won't take it into their heads to use you in a lynching picnic."

"Trust me, pard; Big Mat hes got his eye-tooths cut."

"When will you tackle the job?"

"Didn't you hear me say ter oncet? I'll pick er fuss with one of 'em soon's they strike town. All I ax of you is thet you will look out fer t'other 'un thet he don't salt me 'fore I'm ready arter I've downed his pard."

"I will do it. Of course, I will see fair play."

At this master and tool laughed evilly.

A few moments later some one in front of the hotel shouted:

"Thar she comes!"

Wynder and Big Mat hastened out and mingled with the throng.

Through a cloud of dust the stage whirled into town and was swung up in front of the hotel with a flourish, Round-up Rube riding in beside it.

"Your're a bit late, ole man," cried one of the crowd to the driver. "W'at's ther trub?"

"Road-agents," was the curt reply.

This threw the throng into a fever of excitement, for not since the half-forgotten days of her early existence had Cinnabar been troubled by the knights of the road. A hundred eager questions were asked, but the driver replied:

"Feller on ther hoss thar ur ther cow-puncher in ther hearse kin tell ye 'bout it. I hain't got time. They dipped in an' sent ther agents skippin'."

But when the stage door swung open and the throng caught sight of Grace Newman's face, the road-agents were forgotten for the time."

"Gal in black!"

"Mournin', I reckon."

"She's a bu'ster!"

"Poorty as a chromo!"

"Thar's an ole gal in black, too."

"Must be her mammy."

From the open door Chris Comstock descended and assisted the ladies to alight, Mrs. Newman coming first. The passenger in gray made his appearance last.

Big Mat shouldered his way through the crowd, crying:

"Stan' back hyer an' make room fer ther ladies, you critters. Guv er clean pass thar!"

Obedient to the bully's command, a passage was made to the door of the hotel.

"Git out ther way, you!" exclaimed Mat, giving Cowboy Chris a rude thrust. "We hain't got no use fer puppy dogs roun' whar thar is ladies. Git out, I say!"

With the final words, he slapped the young man's face.

Like a flash Chris Comstock's fist shot out straight from the shoulder, catching Mat Dolby fairly between the eyes and knocking the big blusterer down as if he had been struck by a cannon ball!

CHAPTER IV.

A TREACHEROUS SHOT.

THE blow was "a stunner," such as it never before had been the bully's misfortune to receive. It sent him headlong to the ground, where, for a time, he lay in a quivering heap.

Then Chris quietly escorted the ladies up the steps and through the crowd. They were received at the door by Martin Wynder and the landlord of the hotel.

"I presume this is Mrs. Newman and her daughter?" said Wynder, lifting his hat and

bowing with the grace of an apparent gentleman.

On being assured he was correct, he added:

"I am Martin Wynder of the Blue Jeans Mine, your husband's partner and friend. I shall be happy to be of service to you, Mrs. Newman."

For a moment the lady was startled by coming so suddenly face to face with the man she fully believed a scheming rascal, determined upon robbing her of her rights, but she quickly regained her composure and greeted the plotter with all the grace at her command.

By this time Big Mat had staggered to his feet, and was loudly calling for the man who struck him.

"I shall have to ask you to excuse me, ladies," said Chris, smilingly lifting his hat. "I see I am wanted back there."

Grace impulsively caught his arm and detained him, speaking earnestly:

"Do not go back there, Mr. Comstock!"

"Why not?"

"That big ruffian will hurt you."

"Do you think so? Well, he might try, Miss Newman; but I shall look out for Number One."

"You would not get into a brawl with him?"

"Not if he minds his own business. I have no taste for a quarrel with such a man."

"Then do not go back."

"I trust you will pardon me for telling you so, but, if I followed your advice, I should be acting like a coward, and every man here would think me one. No matter how much I may wish to avoid trouble with such a tough, I must meet him if I am going to remain in Cinnabar. I have struck him, and I must give him satisfaction. There is no way out of it."

It was difficult to convince the girl that this was true, but she soon saw the young cowboy was determined to return and face the brawling ruffian, so she held out her hand to Chris, saying earnestly:

"I hope you will give him such a whipping he will learn to let gentlemen alone after this."

"Thank you," was his reply, as he pressed her hand for a moment. "I will do my best to teach him that lesson, and I think my success will be all the more certain by knowing I have your good wishes."

"Whar is ther measly whelp!" roared the voice of Big Mat. "Let me git at him an' I'll carve his gizzard! I'm ther high howler of ther Sow-west, I am! Whoop! Whar's ther critter as struck ther ragin' lion of Cinnabar? Trot him out an' let me eternally claw him inter ripped up rags! I'll hev his wind fer thet blow! Whar is he?"

"Were you inquiring for me, sir?" asked Chris Comstock, as he came deliberately down the steps.

Big Mat wheeled, his arms akimbo, his hands resting on his hips.

"Wow - wow - woosh!" he howled. "Wur I axin' fer you? Wal, now you've hit it plumb center! You're ther cuss I am lookin' fer!"

"What do you want of me?"

"W'at do I want? Oh, boly smoke! Will you hear thet, pards! This is ther cow-punchin' galoot thet hit me a belch atween ther lookers, an' now he axes w'at do I want with him! I'm goin' ter carve his hide, I am!"

"You are making lots of talk you are not able to back up, you overgrown booby."

The bully gasped for breath.

"Who's er booby?" he shouted.

"You are. It must be you have been drinking too much coffin-varnish. I advise you to go soak your head."

With a yell like the blast of a steam-whistle, the tough drew a wicked-looking knife and started for the undisturbed cowboy.

"I'll cut out yer lung, dern—"

He halted suddenly, the muzzles of a pair of gleaming revolvers staring him in the face. Like magic they had leaped into Chris Comstock's hands, and as the young man's fingers gently pressed the triggers, the hammers partially arose. A bit more pressure would send two bullets through Big Mat's head.

"Hole on!" squawked the astonished tough, ducking his head. "Thet hain't no go!"

"You will find it a go if you do not put up that knife," was the stern retort.

Round-up Rube had been quietly sitting on his horse, near at hand, not even offering to take a hand, which plainly showed he thought his pard fully a master for the Chief of Cinnabar. A chuckle broke from the old fellow's lips as he saw how readily Chris brought the would-be "carver" to a halt.

"Tain't fair!" protested Dolby.

"I suppose not; but it is fair for you to come

at me with a knife—of course it is! You thought to catch me napping, but you made a big mistake that time, you big ruffian!"

"Knife!—w'at knife yer talkin' about?"

"The one you have in your hand."

Big Mat looked at the knife in apparent astonishment.

"Didn't know I hed it in my han'," he protested. "I wuz so derved excited I never knew w'en I drored it. Thet's Gospel facts."

"Very likely!"

"Straight goods. But you hit me, youngker; an' you've got ter settle fer it."

"You struck me first."

"You wuz in my way."

"That will not wash!"

"Anyhow you hit me," doggedly insisted the ruffian; "an' I'm goin' ter hev satisfaction."

"How are you going to get it?"

"Out of your hide, dern ye!"

"And you propose to take it by coming at me with a knife when I am unarmed. You dare not meet me like a man with the weapons Nature has provided us."

"Who says so?"

"I say so."

"Wal, you lie! I'm jest yer man, an' I'll knock ther corners offen you!"

"Then give your weapons to one of your friends. I will do the same, and we will meet like men. What do you say?"

Chris was determined to teach the man a lesson he would not soon forget, but he did not wish to have Big Mat's blood on his hands.

The bully hesitated for a moment, during which several of the throng cried:

"Go fer him, Mat!"

"You've got ter do it!"

"You kin down him!"

"Break his neck!"

"Thet's jest w'at I'll do," declared the chief, as he surrendered his weapons into the hands of a short, squat Irishman who appeared on the scene at this moment. "I'll break ther kid's neck."

"Begorra!" exclaimed the Irishman; "yez kin do it, me b'y. It's Pritty Pat as is bettin' the poile av him thit yez kin!"

Chris passed his weapons to Rube.

"Look out ther skunk don't try some crooked game on ye, pard," cautioned the bow-legged cowboy, passing one of his lower limbs around the pommel of the saddle and sitting sideways on his horse. "He's er p'ison snake. Ef I ketch onter any crooked work, I'll bore suthin', you bet!"

The bully rolled up his sleeves and spat on his hands, keeping his eyes on the young cowboy all the time.

"You hain't goin' ter guv me ther slip, babby," he declared. "I'm jest goin' ter knock ther linin' offen you."

The crowd was excited and delighted at the prospect of a fight, and the hotel steps afforded an excellent witness-stand, without placing any of the throng where they would interfere with either of the parties engaged in the battle.

"Are ye ready?" asked Mat.

"All ready," was the calm reply.

"Wal, hyer I kem, kerwhoopin'!"

The tough made a rush for his foe, which was easily avoided by Chris. The rush was promptly repeated, and the cowboy slipped under the bully's right arm, wheeling in time to give the big brute a whack behind the ear that sent him staggering a few feet forward.

"Slippery, hain't ye!" snarled Mat, turning for another charge. "Wal, I'll git a punch at ye this time."

He did, but the "punch" was wasted on empty air, for Chris did not wait to receive it. At the same moment, with a nimble kick, the cowboy sent the chief's hat flying from his head!

"You should always take your hat off on such occasion as this," observed Chris, laughingly.

"S'pose you think thet's funny!" growled the tough. "Wal, I'll show ye suthin' twicet as funny. Jest you keep still tell I git my claws on ye."

"All right; come ahead!"

Big Mat accepted the invitation, but when he came within reach of Chris Comstock's arms, he was sent staggering back by two blows he could not avoid. Fairly furious, the ruffian made another blind rush, only to find himself caught at an advantage by a pair of iron hands. The next moment the Chief of Cinnabar was lifted off his feet, whirled in the air, and fairly stood on his head. Having performed this trick, Cowboy Chris allowed his antagonist to fall flat on his back in the dust.

A shout of surprise and delight came from the throng. The feat had been neatly executed,

and many of the witnesses could not restrain their admiration.

Big Mat lay still for a moment, evidently dazed by what had happened, blinking up at the clear sky. Then he slowly sat up and looked around.

"Wal, thet's ther wu'st slip I ever made!" he asserted. "Must hev stepped on some grease. Tried ter kick ther sun, I reckon."

"Thet's jest w'at ye did, ole man!" laughed one of the crowd; "but you wuz given a leetle help."

"Dunno as I jest understan' it," confessed the bully, as he scratched his head. "I never tumbled in that way afore."

He deliberately arose to his feet, keeping his eyes on Chris, who stood waiting for the attack to be resumed.

"S'pose you think ye'r smart!" sneered the tough. "Jest 'cause I happened ter make er slip, you think you upshot me. Wal, you never done nothin' of ther kind. Now I'm goin' ter pummel ye, boy!"

He advanced with more caution, his huge clinched fists raised in an awkward guard. Chris instantly fell into a boxing attitude, which told he was no novice in the manly art of self-defense.

The fight now assumed a more serious aspect. Big Mat having learned he could not handle the young man like a child. For a few seconds the sparring was very creditable, then the bully began to press the fighting again. Once more he made a rush, and again Chris avoided him by slipping under his arm.

As he straightened up behind the tough, the young cowboy reached backward over his own shoulders, and clutched Big Mat's heavy shirt at the shoulders. Then, throwing his body forward, Chris fairly flung the bully over his head. Mat landed on his feet, but his momentum was such that he instantly sat down on the ground, uttering a grunt and a groan as his teeth snapped together, with his tongue between them.

"Begorra!" gasped Pretty Pat. "Did ye iver see the loikes av thot! It's th' divvil's own thrick, so it is!"

"Git up, Mat!"

"W'at yer restin' fer?"

"Tired, hain't ye?"

"You'd better join a circus!"

"You've met more'n yer match, ole man!"

This final declaration made the bully furious. He had long been known as the Chief of Cinnabar, and now he saw his prestige slipping from him—stolen by this deceptive young cowboy. Howling like a mad-dog, he leaped to his feet and sprung at the young man once more. Chris met him with a blow that would have knocked down a common man, but the ruffian's rush was not stopped.

"Now I hev got ye, dern ye!" he snarled, claspng his hated foe in his arms.

Just as this happened the smothered report of a pistol was heard near at hand, and, without even a groan, Big Mat sunk to the ground.

"By heavens, he is shot!" was the cry that went up from the spectators.

CHAPTER V.

STANDING OFF THE CROWD.

It was true; Mat Dolby had been treacherously shot down. But, who had done the deed? That was a question no one seemed able to answer.

The report of the weapon had seemed muffled, as if fired from a pocket, and there was no sign of pistol-smoke about any of the throng.

Cowboy Chris seemed dazed for a moment, then he turned to the crowd, crying:

"Where is the man who fired that treacherous shot? The bullet was meant for me, for I felt it whistle past my ear. Who fired it?"

There was no reply.

"It is some cowardly wretch who does not dare to show his head!" scornfully asserted the young man. "I would like to get my hands on him!"

"This is very foine torruk!" cried Pretty Pat. "But Oi am bettin' ye know who foired the shot, ye spalapeen!"

"What do you mean?"

"Kin Oi make me m'anin' any plainer? Ye pretend thit ye don't know who shot th' b'y, but it's mesilf thit knows ye do."

"You are a liar by the clock, you monkey-mouth!"

"Begorra, I seen ye done it!"

"Saw me do what?"

"Shoot th' b'y! Ye hiv a pistil up the slave if yer coat."

Chris could not deny he carried a weapon in his sleeve, and of a sudden he remembered he

had not reloaded it the last time it was used. The little derringer held an empty cartridge in its chamber!

"That is a little too thin!" he retorted. "If I shot this man, others would have seen me do so. You cannot deceive the crowd with such a yarn, Irish."

"Theer's no decavin' about it. Oi know what Oi saw, an' Oi belave theer wur ithers as saw th' same."

"Which is quite true," asserted Martin Wynder, stepping forward. "I saw the weapon in the cowboy's hand as he fired the shot. The trick was very neatly done, but I have a pair of keen eyes."

"And a lying tongue!" hotly cried Chris.

Wynder flushed angrily.

"You shall rue those words, young man!" he declared. "I might have interceded in your behalf, for I have no particular liking for Mat Dolby; but now I shall allow Dolby's friends to give you what you deserve. Whether the man is dead or not, you tried to kill him. That ought to hang you to the nearest tree."

"An' begorra it shall!" shouted Pretty Pat. "Wheer is th' rope, me b'ys? It is th' loikes av a lynching bee we will be after hivin'!"

Angry mutterings came from the crowd. Big Mat had not many friends, but the men were lovers of fair play and did not care to see the bully shot in such a treacherous manner. Chris faced them without flinching, his eyes flashing.

"Men," he cried, "will you believe such a ridiculous story? If I had shot this man, you would all have been able to see the act."

Martin Wynder stepped to the front.

"I saw it because I was looking for something of the kind," he declared. "It is not the first time I have seen the trick performed. When skillfully done, it is apt to deceive every one around. This cowboy did it very neatly, but not quite well enough to fool me."

Chris gave the man a scornful look.

"If you do not get a hot corner down below it will not be your own fault," he declared. "You are the boldest liar I ever saw!"

"If my words are not true, allow your sleeves to be searched," sneered the plotter, who began to believe the young man really had a weapon hidden there. "Surely that is fair."

"Yes, yes, that is fair!" cried a dozen voices.

"Do you consent to this?" asked Wynder.

"No!" was the ringing reply. "Your tale is preposterous, and I refuse to consent to the disgrace of being searched!"

"That is enough!" nodded the claimant of the Blue Jeans Mine, satisfaction gleaming in his dark eyes. "You have condemned yourself! By refusing to be searched, you acknowledge your guilt. Boys," turning to the crowd, "what does he deserve?"

"Ther rope!"

"That is roight!" shouted the Irishman.

"Hurro fer th' rope an' nearest tree!"

Up to this point Round-up Rube had been looking calmly on, showing nothing more than ordinary interest. Of a sudden, he gave a low whistle. At this signal, Chris turned toward him, and Rube tossed his imperiled pard his weapons, which were skillfully caught by the younger cowboy. But, before Chris could get the drop, Wynder's voice rung out sharply:

"Hold hard! I have you covered, young man!"

A revolver gleamed in the mine-claimant's right hand.

"An' I hev you kivered!" asserted Round-up Rube, turning a pair of cocked revolvers on Wynder. "It w'd guv me great sackers-faction ter drill ye, fer you are ther blamest liar in seven States! My pard never shot thet galoot, but I more'n hafe believe you did, ye skunk of a hole in the ground!"

At this moment two more strangers appeared in town, both being mounted on mules, one of the animals being large and the other small. The rider of the larger mule was a young man of rather fine appearance, despite the fact that he was dressed in the rude garb of a miner. Behind him a small prospector's outfit was strapped on the mule's back.

The young man's companion was a "Heathen Chinese," shoes, pig-tail and all. The animal which he rode was the famous "Colorado Canary," the burro. There was no prospecting outfit on the creature's back.

These two singularly mated strangers drew rein in front of the hotel, regarding the scene with interest.

"Hello!" exclaimed the young man. "What does this mean? It looks like trouble."

"Velly blig flight," commented the Chinaman. "Velly much one-slided. Cloud al

jumpee on tlo 'Melican men. Gless we have to chipee in, dlon't it?"

"Well, it looks that way," confessed the younger man. "What do you say, Wun Lung, shall we take a hand?"

"You blet! We tlake tlo hand! They find we velly blad bloys. We shootee like blazes. How this flor high?"

The Chinaman produced a huge horse-pistol from some hidden pocket, deliberately cocked it and turned the muzzle on the crowd, at the same time grinning in a manner that would have stopped a clock.

The other quietly produced and cocked a handsome pair of revolvers.

Thus the two cowboys unexpectedly found some allies.

Martin Wynder was furious.

"We will hang the whole gang!" he snarled.

"Whole glang velly hard cloud, you blet!" declared Wun Lung. "We shootee-shootee velly much; ylou glit hitee velly blad. We havee blood in lour eye. Yum!"

"It begins to look jest er leetle diffunt, don't it, my Christian frien'?" laughed Round-up Rube, coolly surveying the claimant of the Blue Jeans Mine. "Thar are 'bout ernough of us ter make it very warm fer you and your backers."

"Blake it hottee," grinned the Chinaman. "Blake lem thlink Ole Bloy gotee hold of lem! Velly gleat pile of fun!"

"Begobs! we'll make it hot fer yez, ye bloody Haythen!" roared Pretty Pat.

"Whospleak slay not'ing? Velly much loom tlo plaint washee-washee slign on Ilishman lup-per lippe. Chinaman be opee washee slop, hire Ilishman tlo havee slign plainted on lippee and stand in flont of slop. He, he! Gleat skleem! Catchee blig tlade. Whoop-la!"

This caused Pretty Pat to fairly dance with rage.

"Oi wull hiv the skelp av thit Haythen!" he shouted. "Begorra! Oi wur niver so insulted in all me loife before! Luk at th' grin on the moog av th' crayther! It is enough to giv wan th' paralysis, so it is!"

"Ilishman beapee blig fool! like ape!"

"Oh-wow! Lit me git at thit crayther!"

But Wun Lung flourished his big pistol in a threatening manner.

"Bletter kleep loff," he observed. "Chinaman blow velly large lat-hole through Ilishman. Ilishman keep loff letee wind blow tloough wliskers him be all light to-moller; Ilishman come at Chinaman gitee velly blad dose. To-moller him be planted where flowlers blow. Ketchee lon?"

"That is business," declared the Chinaman's companion. "If you know when it is healthy, you will steer clear of Wun Lung, Irish. When he fires that blunderbuss in his hand it usually sweeps the whole country in front of the muzzle."

Martin Wynder stepped forward.

"Ycu have no right to interfere here," he said, restraining his passion and addressing the youth on the larger mule. "You will simply get yourself into trouble. You are altogether too fresh."

"Now you have hit me right where I live," was the laughing reply. "That is the matter with me. I am very, very fresh, and that is why I am called Fresh Ford. When I see a crowd like this on the verge of jumping one or two helpless men, I always have to take a hand. I can't help it, because I am built that way."

"But this young cowboy has just shot the man lying there."

Fresh Ford, as the youthful stranger had called himself, regarded Chris sharply, then turned toward Wynder, saying:

"Well, it is all right if he did. I will bet all I possess he did it in self-defense. He has the right kind of a face, and I am willing to allow he is a boy to tie to."

Wynder stormed furiously.

"You shall pay dearly for this folly!" he snarled.

"Velly gleat mlad," snickered Wun Lung. "Dlance likee tlurky on blot plate. Kleepee clool, lole man; plaps may hlurt lumslelf."

"Thet is good advice, pard," said the bow-legged cowboy. "Ther Chinaman has got more sense than you have, an' thet's a scandalus fac'."

Wynder shook his fist, first at Rube then at Chris.

"You shall hang for this!" he frothed.

"This man is dead—treacherously shot down while engaged in a contest with a person he supposed unarmed, and—"

"Who's dead?" suddenly demanded Big Mat, sitting up and wiping away some blood which

ran down toward his eyes. "I want ye ter know I hain't dead by er derved sight! I reckon ther blamed bullet rubbed my skull poorty hard, but I'm all right. Still, I 'lows I hev got enough of fightin' fer ther present."

Then, to the astonishment of the crowd, he arose to his feet and walked unsteadily away.

CHAPTER VI.

WARNED—BY WHOM?

MARTIN WYNDER uttered an exclamation of disgust as he saw the supposed dead man arise and walk away, while Round-up Rube broke into a laugh.

"Fooled erg'in, Whiskers!" cried the bow-legged cowboy.

"Velly mluch gitee left," observed Wun Lung.

"That is about the liveliest dead man I have seen in a month of Sundays," smiled Fresh Ford.

"Well, this young cowboy *tried* to kill him," doggedly persisted Wynder. "That is as bad as if he succeeded. I do not believe the men of Cinnabar will allow the would-be assassin to escape."

But the spectators' thirst for the young cowboy's life had suddenly diminished on seeing the bully arise and depart, and there were those who expressed their regret that Big Mat's career had not been finished by the bullet, saying Cinnabar would be well rid of an undesirable character.

Wynder suddenly saw the folly of pressing the matter further, and, without a word, turned away.

"What's your hurry?" inquired Fresh Ford.

"Ta-ta!" called Round-up Rube, in a tantalizing manner.

"Melican man feel velly blad," observed Wun Lung. "Him glo loff tlo klick himself."

Pretty Pat had suddenly disappeared, and the crowd began to disperse. However, there were not a few who pressed around Chris Comstock with their congratulations on the manner in which he had handled the Chief of Cinnabar. But the young cowboy did not take very kindly to their protestations, for among them he saw some of the men who had seemed the most eager to hang him for the supposed murder of the tough.

Among other things, Chris was warned to look out for Big Mat, it being said the ruffian would not rest easy till he had been revenged for his disgrace.

The first thing the cowboy pards did was to express their thanks to Fresh Ford and his "Chinee" companion for so promptly siding with them against the crowd.

"Don't mention it!" laughed Ford. "That was the most natural thing in the world for me to do, and I always side with the weak, no matter what the odds. I can't seem to help it, and I notice my friend, Wun Lung, is inclined that way. Allow me to make you acquainted with a white Chinaman, if you never saw one before. This one possesses that admirable quality known as sand, strange as it may seem—the grittiest kind of sand."

"Velly mluch sloft-slope!" exclaimed Wun Lung. "Melican man havee tlo 'scluse my blushee. Chinaman velly blashful."

"You're ther fu'st Heathen I ever saw thet I wuz willin' ter shake han's with," declared Rube; "but I'm proud to grip your fin, my pig-tail pard."

With his usual grin spreading over his face, Wun Lung accepted the bow-legged cowboy's hand, and Rube's terrific squeeze was returned with an interest that amazed the old fellow.

"You've got a grip like iron, No Lungs," he said. "I will risk you."

"Now this yere's my pard, Chris Comstock, as white er lad as ever breathed ther rarefied atmosphere o' this ga-lorious kentry. He's er hummer—er hull team, bull-purp under ther kerriage an' all thet. He's ther right kine ter tie to, you bet!"

"I knew it the minute I set my eyes on him," asserted Fred, grasping Chris's hand.

"I am jest plain Rube Randall, ur Round-up Rube," added the wizen cattleman. "Chris an' I hev got tired o' bein' tied down, so we're rovin' roun' in search fer excitement. We struck er bit jest outside this yere town an' er leetle more jest inside. I opine thar's more ter foller."

"If so, I would like to take a hand in it. My name is Ford Webster, and I am from the East, though I have been in the West long enough to get the rough edge of the tenderfoot off me. Have been prospecting of late, and was on my way to Cinnabar when I was held up by two fellows who thought they would confiscate my mule and property. They were proceeding to

do so when this Chinaman appeared and shot one of them dead with that blunderbuss of a pistol. Then he charged on the other, uttering a yell that sent the would-be robber skurrying out of that section of the country as fast as his legs could carry him. Very naturally, I swore by the Chinaman and we became friends—pards, you might say. We were both bound for Cinnabar, Wun Lung contemplating setting up in the washee business here. That explains how we happened to appear on the scene just as we did."

"Fleshee bloy mlake long tlak, 'splain eblytling. Chinaman havee notling tlo slay. Allee light; let her slide."

"It'll be poorty likely thet you hev made some foes by takin' sides with me an' my pard," said Rube to Ford. "Both you and the Chinaman will have to look out for yourselves."

"Well, I have found it necessary to look out for myself ever since I came into this part of the country, and I think Wun Lung is apt to have his eyes open."

"Keepee leys pleeled allee timee," grinned the Chinaman. "Melican man clach Chinaman sleeping hlave to gitee lup velly learly in day or stlay lup allee nightee."

"Well," said Chris, "I am hungry, and I propose to have some kind of food to alter my feelings. Myself and pard are going to stop here at this hotel."

"We are with you," declared Ford.

"Wun Lung heapee bollal on linslide! Him feel blackblone when him lub stomach with handee. Bly gol! it mlake him velly tlired!"

"Wal, my critter's got ter be seen to," observed Rube.

"And I must find somebody who will go out and bury my poor horse," said the younger cowboy, struck by a sudden thought. "I had almost forgotten him."

The quartette passed around to the stables, conducted by the landlord, who had now made his appearance, having disposed of his lady guests.

It was not a difficult thing to find two men who agreed to bury the young cowboy's horse for a reasonable sum.

Then the four returned and entered the hotel.

As they were passing into the building, a man brushed hastily past them, and Cowboy Chris felt something thrust into his hand. Lifting it, he saw it was a piece of paper.

Chris whirled swiftly to spring to the door, but in so doing he collided with Rube and was detained for a moment. When he reached the door, the person who thrust the slip of paper into his hand had disappeared.

The young cowboy noticed there was writing on the paper, but he had not paused to read it before endeavoring to discover who thrust it into his hand. However, as soon as he saw the unknown had disappeared, he lifted the slip and read the words, which had been hastily written with a lead-pencil.

The chirography was somewhat effeminate.

This is what he read:

"Look out for Martin Wynder! He is your deadly foe!"

A warning, the import of which could not be mistaken. But who had thrust it into Chris Comstock's hand? That was a question he could not answer, and on making inquiry of his companions, he found they had taken no particular note of the person who brushed past them as they entered.

CHAPTER VII.

WYNDER'S STORY.

WYNDER had informed Mrs. Newman he would call on her as soon as she was somewhat recovered from the effect of the journey and tell her the true story of her husband's strange actions and death. The lady urged him to call as soon as possible, as she was eager to know the exact truth, and he said he might be around later in the day, if he could find the opportunity.

Evidently he had little trouble in finding the opportunity, for, just as it was growing dusky, there was a rap on the door of the ladies' room at the hotel, and, when the door was opened, Wynder stood there, bowing, bat in hand.

"I have found time to run round to the hotel and tell you the particulars I promised," he said.

Mrs. Newman invited him in, and Grace placed a chair for him. Martin retained his hat close at hand, as was his custom on all occasions.

"You have come to tell me of my husband?" spoke Mrs. Newman.

"I have."

"I am glad you came so soon, for I am eager

to get at the facts at once. I trust you will pardon me if I say your letters concerning his death and the cause thereof have been very vague and unsatisfactory."

"I am well aware they must have been, madam. It was not an easy thing for me to write you the unpleasant facts, and how much harder will it be for me to tell them to your face!"

"But I insist on knowing," firmly asserted the lady, taking a seat where she could look Martin fairly in the face as well as permitted by the gathering darkness. "It is my right as a wife."

"It can do you no good to know."

"Still I would know. I feel there is some mystery about Mr. Newman's death—a mystery I mean to solve. There is also something strange about the condition of his business as revealed since his death."

"You have said as much in your letters."

"Yes, for I did not dream but he was the sole owner—or very nearly that—of the Blue Jeans."

"It is really a singular thing Mr. Newman did not see fit to inform you when he took me into partnership with him. It was at the time when the mine seemed to have run out—the lead was lost."

"How long ago?"

"About two months—a trifle more perhaps."

"And at that time his letters were the most hopeful and enthusiastic. He did not even hint at any trouble."

Wynder lightly struck his knee, as if a sudden thought had flashed through his mind.

"After all, that was the most natural thing in the world!" he exclaimed. "His entire fortune was invested in the Blue Jeans; if it failed, he was ruined. Why should he not seek to keep the terrible danger from you?"

The widow shook her head.

"It was not like him," she asserted. "George always trusted me in everything."

"It is plain he did not do so on this occasion."

"I am not so sure of that."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind just now what I mean. Go on, Mr. Wynder."

But the plotter hesitated for several moments, seeming hurt by her recent words.

"It is useless for me to tell you anything, Mrs. Newman, unless I have your confidence."

"We must be sure a person is worthy of confidence before we bestow it," ventured Grace, who found it difficult to restrain herself in the presence of the man she firmly believed was robbing them of their rights.

Wynder shook his head slowly.

"I see you are doubtful. Well, I cannot help that. All I can do is to tell you what I know, and regret I ever became entangled in such an unpleasant affair. I am aware that you ladies look on me as an enemy, but I am nothing of the kind. Indeed, I am ready to be your most sincere friend. You are in a wild land, and may need friends. It is a country where evil men abound, and fair women are not safe without a protector."

"But the particulars you were to tell us," said the widow, impatiently; "let's hear them."

"Well, I will make the story as brief as possible, for I have no care to drag out such a tale. It is a story of an unfortunate man beset by evil influences, which soon dragged him to doom."

"I first became acquainted with George Newman about three months ago. At that time I came to Cinnabar to look for an investment, being in a speculative mood. Then Newman was happy and apparently prosperous, for the Blue Jeans was paying, although it surely was not panning out as well as the Bonny Bees. We became acquainted by accident, and I sought his advice in regard to investing the capital in my possession. He gave me some good pointers, took me into his mine, showed me what he was doing, and pointed out what he hoped to do. I offered to purchase an interest, but he flatly refused, although he did so with the courtesy which always characterized his genial ways."

"At that time Mr. Newman said the Blue Jeans was more than paying its way, with a prospect of doing much better very soon. There was no reason why he should take in a partner, unless we except the reason that two heads are often better than one—a fact Mr. Newman afterward found to be true."

"I thought no more of the matter, but looked around for another opening. In some way, Mr. Newman and I became very friendly. The society of the camp was not very satisfactory to either of us, and it was quite a relief for us to get together and talk of things which these common plodders never dream. Despite his busi-

ness abilities, I found George Newman a man of fine thought and great idealism. Although forced to come in daily contact with the rougher side of life, it was not pleasant to him. He was of a somewhat poetic temperament, and was a person I judged easily influenced by another of stronger mind, a thing I afterward found true.

"Within a week after visiting the mine with Mr. Newman I noticed a slight change in his appearance. He seemed worried about something and was extremely nervous. I could not account for it, and, to tell the truth, I did not try, for I considered it none of my affairs.

"I was unsuccessful in finding an investment which pleased me, still I lingered in Cinnabar, meeting Mr. Newman each night and having a pleasant talk with him. But I observed how his nervousness increased, and I felt sure something was going wrong.

"One night he said to me:

"Wynder, do you still wish to become my partner in the Blue Jeans?"

"I was startled by the suddenness of the inquiry, but immediately asked him if he had changed his mind about selling a share. He acknowledged he had.

"But I will not deceive you," came frankly from his lips. "I have a reason for doing so."

"He then went on to speak about the possibility of putting the mine's stock in the market and raising a large sum in that way, but declared he was averse to that plan.

"You may wonder why I wish to raise a sum of money," and he looked me squarely in the eyes. "Well, I am going to tell you the plain truth, then you can come in with me and make a venture which will surely result in disaster or fortune, or you can stay out and be safe. I have no desire to draw you in on false pretenses."

"I was impressed by his frankness, and it was thus he gained my confidence more quickly than he could in any other manner. Had he tried to conceal the truth, I should have suspected there was a reason why he so suddenly changed his mind, and I certainly would not have invested money without once more examining the mine. That would have shown me the true state of things, and I would not have invested at all, as I would then have been sure he was seeking to deceive me.

"He then went on to explain that the lead had been suddenly and most unexpectedly lost, and at the same time the failure of a small banking-house in Denver had left him with scarcely a dollar to carry on business. He was confident the lead could be recovered, but it would take money to carry on the search, and he was down to bed-rock, as they say out here. He enjoined me to secrecy, saying I was the only person who knew the truth, besides himself.

"Had I been thus inclined, I might have used my knowledge to ruin Mr. Newman, but he had made no error in trusting me. As he had been frank with me, I resolved to make an examination and go in with him, if there was a show of coming out all right in the end. I told him as much then, and he pressed my hand warmly.

"The following day I investigated, spending almost the entire day in the mine. When I came out, I was convinced the lead could be recovered, but that work was being carried on in the wrong direction. That night I completed the bargain with your husband, Mrs. Newman, and became an equal partner with him in the mine, a fact he said he should immediately write to you. Did you not receive a letter to that effect?"

"I have a letter in which he spoke of you as his partner," confessed the widow.

The gathering darkness concealed the look of triumph which passed over Martin Wynder's face.

"On the following day," continued the narrator, "I communicated my belief concerning the lead to Mr. Newman. It was some time before I could make him see the matter in the light that I did, but he concluded to give my theory a trial. Work was begun in quite another direction from which he had been prosecuting, and within forty-eight hours the pay-streak was struck. It was not long before he was forced to acknowledge we had hit the true vein, and in a week's time the mine was paying better than ever before.

"It was about that time that a gambler appeared in this town, calling himself Prince Royal. He was a handsome and prepossessing fellow, having a fascinating way about him, and appearing a gentleman born. But he was a snake—a villainous rascal!

"Almost everybody in the mines plays cards. We have no theaters, no lectures, no churches.

Card-playing is our amusement. Mr. Newman indulged only on rare occasions, but for some reason, Prince Royal chose my partner as a victim. I do not understand why he did not select me, for I played a great deal more than George Newman. But the gambler seemed to know his business, and your husband, Mrs. Newman, was the person he decided to fleece.

"Now comes the unpleasant part of my story."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRUTH OR A LIE—WHICH?

It was now so dark the expression on the man's face was quite hidden.

Mrs. Newman apologized for not procuring a light, saying the landlord had not yet provided them with one.

"For which I am sincerely thankful," declared Wynder. "It will be hard enough to tell you the truth here in the dusky darkness, for it will be far from pleasant to your ears; but it would be a hundred times harder for me if there were a light in the room."

"Go on, sir," came quietly from the widow's lips. "No matter how unpleasant it may be, it is my duty to hear it."

The crafty rascal cleared his throat, and continued:

"I sincerely believe Prince Royal exercised some unnatural influence over Mr. Newman—more, I am sure of it. Newman himself confessed it was so, and the gambler did not deny it, bold villain that he was!

"It was not long before Mr. Newman was spending the greater part of his time in company with Prince Royal, and the most of that time was passed in playing cards for money. He—"

But Grace could restrain herself no longer.

"My father was not a gambler!" she hotly exclaimed. "You cannot make me believe that!"

Wynder replied with deliberation:

"I told you I had to come to the unpleasant part of the story, and I expected you would doubt my words; but I am telling you nothing but the truth. Mr. Newman did not care to have it known he gambled, and the fact was kept a secret as much as possible, although there were those in Cinnabar who suspected it—some knew it. Royal would come to the office of the mine, and they would play there, with drawn curtains. That is, they did so as long as I would stand it; but I finally kicked against it so stoutly that they were forced to abandon that resort for another. Where this later place of misfortune was I cannot say.

"Day by day Mr. Newman grew haggard, and a strange light crept into his eyes. He did not look one squarely in the face, as of old. I knew he was losing, and I did my best to dissuade him from further folly. It was useless. The demon of cards had laid its foul grasp upon him, and he was unable to break away.

"I have said I believe Royal exercised a powerful influence over the man he had chosen for a victim. Several times I asked Mr. Newman if he liked the man. His eyes would glow, and he almost always replied:

"Like him! I hate him!"

"Still, for all that, he allowed the gambler to lead him on and on to ruin and doom.

"One morning after an entire night spent with Royal, I found my partner in a wretched state. He was so excited and nervous that he appeared like a hysterical woman.

"Newman," I said, laying my hand on his shoulder as he sat in a chair at the office, "you are killing yourself."

"He sprang up as if touched by an electric wire and dashed across the room, shouting:

"It is not that! It is not that!"

"I was astounded, but I got him by the arm and forced him into the chair again.

"What do you mean by such an outburst?" I asked. "You appear like a demented person this morning."

"Crazy—demented!" he retorted. "It is a wonder I am not! Oh, that cursed villain!"

"Who do you mean?"

"Prince Royal, the infernal scoundrel!"

"Look here, Newman," came soberly from my lips, "why don't you drop that card-sharp?"

And he replied:

"Wynder, I can't! Strange as it may seem to you, I am telling the sober truth when I say I cannot drop him. I have made at least a dozen resolves to do so, but I find it impossible to keep them. I do not know why it is, but, although I hate and detest him, I find it impossible to get away from him. He has me foul."

"Of course, I could not understand this, and I derided him for his weakness.

"It is a weakness," he confessed, "but one I

am unable to overcome. Wynder, I shall leave my wife and child to poverty!"

"Not if I can help it!" I cried. "If I can do nothing with you, I will try my luck with the card-sharp himself!"

"I wish you would!" came eagerly from his lips; "I wish you would drive him out of Cinnabar!"

"I resolved to try that very thing, and without delay, I sought Prince Royal. I found him calmly sleeping at the hotel, and he was decidedly angry at being aroused. But I was angry myself, and I went straight to the point.

"Royal," I said, sternly, "what kind of a game are you playing with my partner?"

"Poker," was his reply—"poker with a sky-high limit. Oh, it is a large game!"

"You know that is not what I mean. You have gotten Newman into your power in some way, and he is unable to get out. Now, let me give you a pointer: If you do not let up on him, there is going to be trouble."

"He actually whistled in my face.

"It seems that something is gnawing you," was his insulting response. "What do you take me for?"

"A card-sharp and a scoundrel!—an infernal villain and a cheat!"

"I had my hand on a revolver, and I was fully determined to shoot him dead if he attempted to draw. But he did not; he simply laughed.

"It won't work," he asserted. "You have come here for the purpose of drawing me into a fuss and shooting me, but I am too sharp for you. Keep a close grip on that revolver, pard."

"Failing in this, I began to threaten him, and I finished by asserting I would shoot him if he did not immediately leave Cinnabar. Again he laughed in my face, saying I would change my mind when I cooled off. And I did; I did not want his blood on my hands.

"And so this attempt to save my partner was a failure. Royal remained, and Mr. Newman continued to gamble with him.

"One morning I found my partner in a worse condition than ever before, and in a short time I succeeded in discovering he had gambled away every dollar of ready money he possessed.

"Now you will have to stop," I said.

"He shook his head.

"There is no such word as stop. Why, last night that infernal blood-sucker tried to get me to remain in the game and venture an interest in the mine!"

"To say I was startled would be putting it mildly. I began to comprehend the full extent of the gambler's villainy, and the thought that he might soon hold a share in the mine filled me with fury.

"But what could be done?"

"There is only one thing," said my unfortunate partner. "I must sell you my share in the mine."

"And gamble the money away, as you have the other!"

"No, I will leave Cinnabar. I will go away secretly in the night when no one knows anything about it. Once far, far away, I will be all right, for I shall be beyond the influence of this human devil."

"I considered the matter for a long time, and I finally came to the conclusion that he had struck upon the only way to save himself. But it would not do to let him have the money till he was ready to depart. I cautioned him to keep his intention a profound secret, while I would get everything ready for the move. To this he consented, and the plan was carried out. He transferred all the old papers into my hands and made out some new ones, and, with the money in his possession, he left Cinnabar in the night, promising to write me from Denver.

"But, in some way, the villainous gambler had become aware of Mr. Newman's intention, and in the morning he was gone from the camp. As soon as I learned of this, I became uneasy, and my uneasiness increased with the day. When night came I was unable to sleep, for I dreamed horrible things of Mr. Newman's murder. I decided to send out a party to look for the man in the morning, and I did so.

"Within ten miles of Cinnabar the body of my former partner was found. It was brought into camp and buried in our cemetery. He had been shot through the head from behind, and I have no doubt but it was the work of Prince Royal. Not a dollar was found on the body.

"That is the whole of the story."

There was a profound silence for several moments, then the widow caught her breath with a little gasp and asked:

"You are certain it was my husband's body you found—you identified him?"

"As well as I could?"

"As well as you could? what do you mean by that?"

Wynder hesitated, but Mrs. Newman insisted that he should answer.

"Well, then, to tell you the truth, the body—and the face in particular—had been somewhat mutilated by vultures. Still there is not a doubt but it was your husband."

"Why not a doubt?"

"The clothes were his, and the things which the robber left in his pockets I recognized. They are here in this package," taking a paper-wrapped parcel from his pocket. "And here is the ring which he always wore. That was proof conclusive, for I found it upon the finger of the corpse."

It truly seemed all the proof one could ask for.

Grace was very silent. She had shed no tears, but the expression of her face could not be seen.

"In the morning," said Wynder, "if you wish, I will come over and escort you to your husband's grave."

"Thank you. We will be ready to accompany you at an early hour."

The man arose to depart, but found himself confronted by a dusky figure that had arisen from one of the other chairs.

"Stop a moment, Mr. Wynder."

It was Grace's voice, but it sounded strained and unnatural.

The man involuntarily recoiled a step, as if he feared an attack.

"What has become of this Prince Royal?"

The question seemed to take him by surprise, for he hesitated and stammered before replying:

"I do not know."

"Have you done nothing to find out—nothing to avenge the murder of the man who was your partner?"

"Yes, yes! I have done everything in my power. I put several men on the search for the dastardly wretch, and they trailed him quite to Santa Fe. There they lost track of him."

"And did not find it again?"

"No."

"They must have been anything but skillful trailers."

"They were called skillful."

"It hardly seems as if you have done your duty in trying to avenge my father's death. If this gambler really killed my poor father, he shall be hunted down and punished as he deserves. I am nothing but a girl, but I could not rest while I knew my father's assassin lived."

She stepped aside, and Wynder moved hastily toward the door, a sudden chill having passed over his body. As quickly as possible in accordance with natural politeness, he bade them good-night, then departed.

When the visitor was gone, the girl came and knelt beside her mother's chair.

"Mother."

"Yes, my child."

"That man did not tell the truth."

"Are you sure, Grace?"

"Yes; something in my heart tells me he lied. He may have told some things which were true, but he lied about the most of them. He is a villain!"

"You are right!" spoke a hollow voice, which seemed to float in at the open window. "He is a villain and a murderer!"

"Great heavens!" screamed Mrs. Newman, springing to her feet. "That was my husband's voice!"

CHAPTER IX.

TWO APPARITIONS.

WYNDER descended the stairs and left the hotel, turning his steps toward the Blue Jeans Mine. He muttered to himself as he walked along.

"That was a pretty good yarn, although it had some weak points. I did not think they would ask what I had done to punish Prince Royal for the murder, and I bungled a little right there. But, on the whole, I think they swallowed it quite well. They did not make the inquiries about the transfer of the mine the same as I expected, and my preparation for such questions proved unnecessary on this occasion, though it may come in handy later on. There is going to be a struggle for the mine. If I only had possession of that paper old Newman started to show me one day I would be all right. The paper is forever lost, without doubt, and I am safe."

"I have some tools that are valuable, and Dustin is one of them. He is the handiest fellow I ever saw when it comes to pen work, and he can get up some papers to deceive the very elect. I will set him to work on them to-mor-

row, for I ought to have them now. If that fellow only had the courage of Mat Dolby, we would form a partnership to cheat the world. He lacks sand. I scarcely wonder, for he is a sissy-man at best."

"If anything should happen that Mrs. Newman attempted to get hold of the mine, I would fight for it. I could make a stern battle, and the chances would be in my favor. If I had obtained possession of the woman and girl as I planned, I would have held them till they made over everything into my hands—relinquished all claim to the mine. But perhaps it is well enough as it is."

"Mrs. Newman is a really charming woman. If I thought there was a show for me, I would try my fortune there. With her for my wife, there would be none to dispute my claim to the mine. It is worth contemplating. But, if she knew the truth, she would not be likely to marry the man who killed her husband, for with my own hand I sent the bullet through his head. The vultures mutilated his body, and he is buried over yon in Cinnabar's graveyard."

"This is one of the great games of my life, and I have been engaged in many. Some have succeeded; some have not. It is true I am sometimes startled by the magnitude of the crimes by which my hands are stained; but what is life good for if one cannot scheme and plot. It is half the pleasure of living in this world, and as for the next world—Bah! there is none! Death ends all! A dead man is dead; he never returns as a spirit. I will hold to that, for never yet have I seen a spirit. I can put no faith in what I have not seen."

Talking or thinking thus, to himself, he reached the office, which stood a short distance from the building that concealed the mouth of the shaft. Inserting a key, he unlocked the door and entered. It closed behind him with a snap of the spring lock.

Wynder fumbled in his pocket for a match.

"Hang the luck!" he growled. "I do not believe I have a match in—Great Scott!"

The exclamation was caused by the appearance of a patch of white light on one of the office walls. At first it was about the size of a man's hand, but it gradually increased till it was as large as a person's head. There was no expression to it at first, and Wynder stared at it in surprise.

But gradually the patch of light took the shape and form of a human being's head. By imperceptible degrees the features became plainer and more distinct till at last they hung before Wynder's staring eyes fully recognized in all their ghastly and ghost-like horror.

It seemed like the head of a corpse, and that corpse—

George Newman!

As if chained to the floor Martin Wynder stared at the awful apparition, his blood seeming clogged in his veins and his heart almost ceasing to beat. Never before in all his life had he seen anything like it, for the features were the exact counterpart of those belonging to the dead owner of the Blue Jeans Mine. It was as if the murdered man's head was there before his slayer's eyes, a white light glowing from every part of it.

Then, to complete the villain's terror, a hollow voice, which seemed to issue from the parted lips of the death-head, distinctly said:

"Assassin, perjurer, thief, your hours are numbered!"

Like a flash, the ghostly head vanished, and the fear-stricken man was shaking from head to foot in the darkness of the office.

With a gasping groan, Wynder wheeled and tore at the door behind him. By chance his hand fell on the little knob of the spring-lock, and he was able to jerk the door open. As he did this, he felt as if something had brushed lightly against him, and he fancied an unseen form had passed out into the night.

But, Martin did not stop. Uttering a cry, he leaped out of the office, slamming the door behind him. Straight toward the building which concealed the mouth of the shaft he ran, and all the time he felt as if he were pursued by some fearful thing.

Never before in all his life had the man received such a scare.

Reaching the building, he cowered close under the wall, his breath sounding like the gasps of a dying person. Keenly his eyes searched the surrounding darkness, and he more than half-expected to see that horrible apparition appear before him again.

For a long time he crouched and shivered there like a whipped cur, but gradually his nerves became quieter and he was more like

himself. Still it was a long time before he ventured to utter a sound. At length, a harsh laugh broke from his dry lips.

"What a fool I am!" he huskily muttered. "That was all a freak of my imagination—nothing more! It could not have been anything more! There are no such things as spirits, and the dead are dead! Yet, how plain it was! I never saw anything more plainly in all my life. And the voice—that was as distinct as possible. I must be getting into a wretched condition to imagine such things! Can it be I am drinking too much and this is nothing more than a touch of the tremens? Great Heaven! I hope I am not getting into that condition!"

He felt of his arms and legs and found they were still shaking a little. He tried to steady himself, but that he found no easy thing to do.

"That must be the explanation—I have been drinking too much of the vile stuff they sell for liquor out here. It is enough to ruin any man's nerves. If I had remained in the office and struck a light, I would have been all right. I will go back there. But no, I am afraid I have not the nerve to do that. Although I now know it was a trick of my imagination, I am in no condition to re-enter that dark room to-night."

The more he thought of his recent fright the more foolish it seemed, and he roundly condemned himself for so foolishly running away.

"Spirits!" he sneered. "Why, just before I entered the office, I expressed my opinion that there are no such things. I have defied them a hundred times, and I defy them again—"

"Beware!"

Wynder jumped as if shot, wheeling toward the point from which the voice had seemed to come. There in the darkness he saw the dusky outlines of a form—a woman's figure!

"Who is that?" demanded the scheming rascal, lifting the revolver in his hand. "Speak or I fire!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

It was a chilling laugh, and it caused an icy thrill to run over the man's body.

"Murderous wretch! from this hour to the hour of your death you shall be haunted by the spirits of your victims!"

Martin Wynder decided that *this* was no hallucination. The words were really spoken by the woman whose figure he could indistinctly see.

"Who are you?" he snarled. "Don't try any trickery on me!"

"I am the spirit of Hester Doyle, whom you foully murdered!"

With a snarling exclamation, the haunted man lifted the revolver, pulling on the trigger. The weapon was a self-cocker, and the click of the hammer followed, but there was no report!

"Poor fool!" came from the apparition. "Do you think you can harm a spirit?"

"Well, I will try lead on one, and see what effect it will have!"

Again he pulled the trigger, but the fall of the hammer was followed by a dull click and no report. Six times in all he repeated this act, but no shot woke the echoes of the night.

Once more Martin Wynder was seized by an uncontrollable terror. Flinging the revolver from him, he uttered a wild cry and dashed from the spot, rushing straight toward the center of the camp, the wild laugh of the mysterious figure ringing in his ears as he fled.

CHAPTER X.

STRAIGHT TALK FROM CHRIS.

STRAIGHT toward the "Bang-up" Saloon rushed the terrified man, now and then casting frightened glances over his shoulder. Within the town he passed several persons, and more than one paused and stared after him in astonishment, for never before had they seen Martin Wynder tearing along after such a fashion.

The frightened rascal did not pause till he was at the very door of the saloon, and could plainly hear the music, shuffling feet, babel of voices, and occasional shouts which came from within the place. Then he halted, his hand seeking a second revolver as he stood panting at the door of the saloon.

"Gone!"

The exclamation came from his white lips, as he made the discovery that his other revolver was missing.

"What in the devil ailed my weapon when I tried to use it, and where is its mate? Has the very Old Nick got into things to-night?"

It almost seemed that way to the fear-shaken plotter.

"What made me run? This is a question I cannot answer. I was suddenly seized by an im-

pulse to flee, and I could not refrain from doing so. Something besides my own will seemed to govern my actions.

"That was no spirit, but I surely did not imagine I saw the woman. She was there, and had my revolver worked, I would have sent a bit of lead through her. That would have cured her of her desire to play a joke on me.

"Joke! Was it a joke? She claimed to be the spirit of Hester Doyle, and what person living knows Martin Wynder was ever anything to Hester Doyle? There is something about it I cannot understand. Hester Doyle is dead, for did I not put her out of my way when, after discovering our marriage was all a sham, she insisted I should marry her in good faith? I surely did!

"Yet who was that woman who knew of Hester Doyle? Great God! Can it be there are such things as spirits and I am really to be haunted by my victims? I cannot believe it possible, yet what other explanation can there be for what I have seen to-night, for I now believe I really saw the death-head in the office?

"And my revolver—what ailed it? Never before has the weapon failed me, and I always carry it ready for instant use. Still, to-night every cartridge refused to explode. And that woman, were she flesh or spirit, did not seem in the least alarmed when I attempted to shoot her. If she was flesh—a human being—she must have been mad to face a man with a revolver in his hand.

"My other weapon—what has become of it? It should be here in my left-hand pocket. I am sure I have not left it anywhere, so it must have worked from my pocket as I was running.

"I am now convinced that what I saw was not caused by the liquor I have been drinking. It was no hallucination of the brain.

"Here I am trembling from head to feet once more! What makes me tremble now? I am no longer afraid. I must be all broken up! I believe I will go in and take a drink to brace my nerves."

Assuming as nonchalant an air as possible under the circumstances, he entered the saloon.

Immediately on passing through the doorway, Wynder found himself in that portion of the Bang-up Saloon set aside for gambling. The card-tables were nearly all in use, and a faro lay-out was doing a thriving business. Midway of the room was the bar, a set of double counters running across the room, leaving a wide passage at one end. Between these two counters three men were kept busy setting out the drinks for the thirsty souls within the saloon. All the liquor was kept under the bars.

The further part of the room was the dance-hall, and more than two-score of human beings were whirling over the floor to the inspiring strains of a rather lively waltz tune. The music was provided by a barrel-organ.

Wynder made his way to the bar and called for whisky, dashing off a glass as soon as it was placed before him. Once more he filled the glass nearly to the brim, but as he was on the point of lifting it to his lips, a hand was laid upon his arm and a hoarse voice said:

"Wal, boss, can't ye let us in?"

It was Big Mat, the Chief, a dirty handkerchief being tied around his head beneath his hat. He had a companion in the form of the Irish rascal, Pretty Pat.

"It's excadin'ly droy the throats av us be, Misther Wynder," put in the "son av the ould sod." "We are nearly droying fer th' bit av a drink."

A scowl passed over the mine-claimant's face, but he promptly motioned to the barkeeper for glasses, saying:

"Yes, you can drink at my expense."

"Middy thanks, yez Honor," bowed Pretty Pat, hastening to turn out the liquid poison. "It's plazed we will be to tip th' bilt av yez."

"Thet's er fac'," echoed the bully, grasping the bottle in turn. "You're er double-an'-twisted gentleman, Pard Wynder."

The liquor was disposed of, and, at a motion from Wynder, the three moved to a vacant table and sat down.

"You made a bad botch of your attempt to dispose of the cowboys, Mat," observed Martin.

The bully uttered a growl.

"I didn't size ther young galoot up kerrect," he acknowledged. "Thar wuz more stuff in him then I thought. But, w'at's ther matter with ye, pard? You're white ez if ye hed seen er ghost, an' yer han' shakes."

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing!" Wynder hastened to declare. "I am all right."

"Begorra! yez may be all roight, but th' look av yez gives yez th' loie."

"Then you should remember appearances are often deceptive. But we were speaking of these cowboys. Where are they to-night?"

"Ef you'd looked very cluss, you'd seen them in this very saloon. One of 'em's dancin', while t'other's lookin' on."

"An' th' fresh b'y wid th' Haythen Chinees is in here too," added Pat. "Oh, it's gittin' at thit pig-tailed naygur Oi'll be doin' wan av these toimes!"

"I care nothing for this Fresh Ford and the Chinaman," declared Wynder. "It is the cowboys I want disposed of as soon as possible!"

"I kem mighty nigh bein' disposed of w'en I wuz gittin' at one of 'em," growled Mat. "Irish made a bad shot thet toime."

"Were you the one who fired that shot?" asked Martin.

"Be jabez! Oi am ashamed to allow thit Oi wuz. It's a moighty big blunder Oi was afther makin'."

"Well, I should say so!"

"Oi foired from me pocket, yez see."

"No, I did not see, but I suspected the bullet was meant for the cowboy."

"Thit same it wur."

"An' it kem mighty nigh bein' my everlastin' sickness. I might hev downed the cow-puncher thet time."

"Yez moight—in a born! Ye are no match fer ther b'y, me daisy. If ye downed th' loikes av him, yez will hiv to do it whin he is not lookin'."

"Well, I want him downed," came from Martin Wynder's lips. I care not how the job is done if they are only put out of the way. I have taken a hatred to them that I cannot overcome."

"An' is it a payin' job, boss?"

"I offered Mat a hundred for each of them."

"An' he will surely take me in wid him. Th' two av us kin polish thim off."

"Do not try it openly. Get at them when they are not expecting it."

"Trust us for thit. Oi will tap thim a knock on th' hids, an' thim Mat kin give thim the length av his knife. Thit will put thim to sl'ape in foine shape."

"The money will be ready as soon as you do that."

"Are yez shakin' on it, boss?"

"Not here. There are too many around. I do not care to be seen with you fellows too much."

At this both of the toughs uttered a growl.

"Derned p'tic'ler, hain't ye!" snapped Big Mat.

"Oi do not suppose th' loikes av us are good enough fer yez?" sneered Pat.

"It is not that," Wynder hastened to say, seeing his tools had misunderstood him. "You know I joined in with you against the cowboys, and if we are seen too much together, it will be said I had a reason for doing so. There may be a row raised when these fellows are found cold, and you will need backers. If I step in, it will be all right, providing people cannot say I was behind the whole affair. See?"

The two toughs confessed they did.

"Then I will get away before we are spotted. Keep your eyes open for your opportunity."

"You bet."

"We will call fer th' cash to-morrow, Misther Wynder."

The chief villain covertly slid a five-dollar gold piece across the table.

"This is to pay for your bracers," he said. "But have a care not to get too much of a load on."

Pretty Pat's hand covered the yellow coin, as that rascal grinned:

"Thank yez, boss; ye're a jintleman av th' roight sort. May yez live till yez are ready to doie."

Wynder arose and left the table. As he did so, Cowboy Chris and Round-up Rube came out from the part set off for dancing. The bow-legged cowboy gave the mine-claimant a significant glance, and then turned toward the two toughs at the table.

"Birds o' a feather!" was his comment.

The chief rascal's hand fell toward the pocket where he usually carried his weapon, but the revolver was not there.

"Go on, curse you!" he grated, as the cowboys continued on their way. "You are both marked men!"

Something caused him to follow them across the room, and he saw them pause and watch the game at the faro table. The Chinaman, Wun Lung, was also a spectator near the table.

As Wynder approached, the dealer looked up and perceived him, immediately calling:

"Hello, Martin! Going to try your luck?"

"Not to-night," was the reply. "If I did, I should surely bust the bank."

"He, he!" snickered Wun Lung. "Him velly gleat hand tlo blust blanks! Him blust gleat many blanks. Blanks not this klind. He, he!"

Wynder turned pale, then his face became dark as a thunder-cloud.

"What do you mean, you infernal pig-tailed imp?" he snarled, taking a step forward, as if to lay hands on the Chinaman.

"Holdee lon!" cried Wun Lung, retreating a bit. "Kleepee hands loff Chinaman, lum gitee blurt!"

"I want to know what you mean!" asserted the angry man. "You insinuated something, though it is difficult to tell what you mean by that infernal jargon. Explain!"

"No lexplainees."

"Why not?"

"Dlon't havee tlo."

"By heavens! I have half a mind to break your nose!"

Wun Lung promptly put up his hands in a guarding attitude.

"Comee lon!" he cried. "Chinaman glib 'Melican man tlo threepoints. Chinaman velly blad boy with fistee. Him tlaake lessons lof Johnee L. Comee lon, him knockee corner loff lum, see how lum likee that."

"I will not disgrace myself by getting into a quarrel with such a creature," asserted Wynder, with dignity. "But, if you are in town to-morrow, you pig-tailed whelp, I will see that you are run out or hanged to the nearest tree! That is the kind of a man I am, and I mean business!"

Chris Comstock stepped forward.

"That is a threat you should be ashamed of, and you would be ashamed if you were anything but a most contemptible villain!" came deliberately from the fearless young man's lips.

Wynder recoiled as if struck, and for several moments he was unable to speak. Finally he hissed:

"You shall pay dearly for those words, you young puppy!"

Chris snapped his fingers.

"That for your frothing threats, Martin Wynder. You can frighten nobody with them. You say you will see this Chinaman hanged or run out of town, but you will do nothing of the kind. The chances are you will be hanged yourself or run out of town."

"You infernal dog!" panted Wynder. "Do you dare talk like this to me!"

The cowboy continued, calmly:

"My advice to you is to get out of Cinnabar while you have a chance and before the people become aware of the notoriously crooked game you have played. It will be better for you to do so, for the truth is bound to come out sooner or later."

"I do not know what you mean."

"Your lips say so, but they lie! You do know what I mean! I have been making some inquiries concerning you, and I find it is still a mystery to many people how you hold possession of the Blue Jeans Mine. You came here only a few months ago in company with a gambler known as Prince Royal, and in some way you got George Newman into your power. You lured the man on while the card-sharp fleeced him. Royal has disappeared, and no one knows whither he has gone. Mr. Newman is dead, and you hold possession of his property. There is a big rat in the meal, and he is bound to come out. When he does, you will find yourself in a tight corner, Martin Wynder, so-called."

The mine-claimant's face became pale once more, but his eyes blazed.

"You shall suffer for these insults!" he asserted, speaking as calmly as he could under the circumstances. "You will find you have made a big mistake in trying to buck against Martin Wynder. I have the papers to show I am the rightful owner of the Blue Jeans Mine by right of purchase. I paid good money for everything I possess in Cinnabar, and I have not a few friends here who will stand by me against any one who may try to rob me of my rights."

"The time is not far distant when you and your friends will wish they had never seen this town. There are plenty of honest men in this town who will not see George Newman's widow and daughter robbed by a miserable scoundrel."

Wynder's hand slid into the pocket which usually contained his revolver, but once more he found the weapon missing. Had it been there, he would have had no chance to use it, for Chris Comstock cried, sternly:

"Take your hand off your pocket, sir! I have you lined!"

Which was true, the young cowboy having drawn a weapon with characteristic swiftness.

With a snarl the villain's hand was withdrawn.

"It is your time now," he said, with all the calmness he could command. "Mine is coming right soon!"

He turned and walked deliberately out of the saloon.

CHAPTER XI.

FRESH FORD ON HAND.

THE following morning Martin Wynder was on hand to escort the mother and daughter to George Newman's grave. They were soon ready to accompany him, and the three set out together.

Wynder was exceedingly polite and affable, seeming so much like a perfect gentleman that Mrs. Newman caught herself wondering if the man could indeed be a villain. If he were, then he was certainly to be dreaded, for he was no ordinary rascal.

Cinnabar's cemetery was on the outskirts of the camp, the buildings at the mouth of the Blue Jeans Mine being in plain view.

When the graveyard was reached, Wynder pointed out a mound of earth which had not been long erected. To the astonishment of the widow and her daughter, a handsome marble shaft had been erected at the head of the grave.

"I caused it to be placed there," explained Wynder. "I thought it would not seem so bare and lonely. I will have it removed, if you wish to put up another to suit your own taste."

They also saw fresh flowers had been strewn on the grave.

Wynder immediately left them alone by the last resting-place of the unfortunate husband and father.

Mrs. Newman's tears flowed freely, but Grace's eyes were dry. The girl had loved her father with all the affection of a true daughter, but for some reason, she felt no desire to weep as she stood there beside the mound.

Upon the pure white shaft was cut:

"GEORGE NEWMAN,

"DIED JULY 21, 18—."

For a long time the mother and daughter remained beside the grave. While they were there, the two toughs, Pretty Pat and Mat Dolby, came staggering along, both being unusually full of bad liquor.

"Hello!" growled Big Mat, pausing with his feet very wide apart and turning his red eyes on the widow and her daughter. "Looker hyer, pard; hyer's caliker."

"Begorra, this is a fact!" nodded Pat. "It looks loike it wur th' ould duck an' th' goosaling. Faith! an' it's a foine pair they be!"

"That's a fac', Paterick, me noble sir. They jest look scandulus invitin', an' thet's bed-rock truth!"

"It's th' young birrud as takes the eye av me. Oi'd not moind st'aln' a kiss from the two pretty rid lips av her."

"Ther old gal's good enough fer me," chuckled Mat. "Let's go catch the pair."

"Oi am wid yez."

Mrs. Newman and Grace had overheard a portion of this talk, and they were greatly terrified.

"We must run, mother!" exclaimed the girl.

"But we cannot run fast enough to get away from them!"

"I am not sure of that; they are both intoxicated."

"How are we to get past them?"

"We cannot; we must run they other way."

"That will take us from town. Oh, where is Mr. Wynder?"

But the mine-claimant was not in sight, and there was no alternative but to take to flight, which they did. Instantly the two ruffians started after them, calling for them to stop. This only gave them additional terror, and for a time they more than held their own with the pursuing toughs.

This did not last long, for Mrs. Newman's strength began to give out. Soon the heavy tread of the pursuers was heard close behind them.

"Hole on thar!" roared Big Mat. "W'at's ther use ter run? You can't git erway!"

"It's ounly windin' av yezzelf ye are, me foine birruds," added Pretty Pat.

With a cry of despair, Mrs. Newman whirled and faced the cowardly wretches, and the next moment she was clasped in Big Mat's arms.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the brute. "Now I hev ye, ole gal!"

Grace whirled and came at the ruffian like a furious cat, and in another moment Big Mat had received such a scratching as had never before fallen to his fortune.

"Oh, holy jumping up jee-thutter!" he howled. "Take this thing off 'fore I'm all tored ter pieces, pard! Take her off, I say!"

"Thit's jist what Oi am afther doin', me b'y," and the Irishman dragged the screaming girl away.

At this moment another person appeared on the scene: it was Fresh Ford.

Snatching the girl from the Irishman's grasp, he sent the wretch staggering to the ground, knocked down by a single blow. In another moment, Big Mat was served in the same manner.

The two astonished toughs struggled up, their hands falling upon their ready weapons.

"Hands off, or chew hot lead!"

It was Ford that spoke, and he covered the discomfited men with a pair of heavy revolvers.

"Great thunder!"

"Mither av Mowses!"

"I mean business," declared the young man; "and I have more than half a mind to shoot you anyway."

"Hiven kape ye from hivin' a whole moind!"

"Don't shoot, pard—don't!"

"Then get up and get out of this! Belively!"

They lost no time in obeying the command, hurrying away toward the town.

Fresh Ford put up his weapons and turned toward the mother and daughter, who were clasped in each other's arms.

"Grace—Mrs. Newman!"

"My gracious!" cried the girl, starting forward, her hands outstretched. "It is Ford—Ford Webster!"

He caught her fingers in his grasp, and it is pretty certain he would have kissed her if her mother had not been present.

"Why, Ford!" cried Grace in delight. "Is it really and truly you—can it be?"

"It is, without a doubt; but I little expected to see you here."

Mrs. Newman came forward and held out her hand, but there was none of the impulsiveness which characterized her daughter's greeting.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Webster," she said. "You appeared very fortunately for us, and we are bound to thank you for what you have done."

There was something about these words which chilled the young man, and he instantly fell into a manner of gentlemanly reserve.

Grace noticed this, but tried to conceal it as much as possible by her own friendly manner.

"How in the world does it happen you are here, Ford?" she asked. "You are the last person I would have dreamed of seeing, and the one above all others I am the most pleased to see," with something like a defiant look at her mother.

Such words as these could not fail to be pleasing to the young man's ears, and he showed his gratitude by a look.

Then came explanations as to the cause of their meeting, and for the first time Ford Webster heard of the death of Mr. Newman.

Once more Mrs. Newman thanked him for what he had done.

"We are stopping at the Washington Hotel, Mr. Webster," said the widow, "and we would be pleased to have you call."

He bowed, but Grace detected a doubtful look on his face, and she instantly cried:

"You must come, Ford! Give me your promise that you will. You cannot refuse, and surely you have not forgotten old times!"

Forgotten! No, not he! The memory of those old days was of the bitter-sweet sort that one does not easily forget.

He accompanied them back to town, and before leaving them, promised to call at the hotel, which was quite enough to make little Grace happier than she had been since hearing of her father's death.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SITUATION ASSUMES A NEW ASPECT.

FORD WEBSTER and Grace Newman had been schoolmates and youthful lovers, but the girl's father had not favored the young fellow's attentions to his daughter. The cause of this was a former trouble between Newman and Ford's father, the former firmly believing Horatio Webster had bitterly wronged him.

When the attentions of the youthful gallant came to Mr. Newman's notice, he had promptly forbidden Grace having anything further to do

with the son of his enemy, and he had been seconded by Mrs. Newman.

There is no more certain way of making two infatuated young people believe they are madly in love with each other than by attempting to keep them apart, and George Newman discovered his words had simply fanned the flame he hoped to extinguish. Then Grace was taken out of school and put under the supervision of a private tutor and chaperon.

Shortly after this, Horatio Webster died, and Ford was thus left alone in the world, his mother having been dead several years. When his father's affairs were settled, Ford discovered he had scarcely a dollar in the world. Greedy creditors swallowed everything.

Then the young man resolved to strike out for himself and make a fortune, and what was more natural than that he should follow Horace Greely's advice. In the mining country fortunes were sometimes made in a day, so he became a wandering prospector, tenderfoot though he was. Up to the date of this story he had made no big strike, although he had succeeded in finding sufficient "yellow" to enable him to exist. When he made the fortune he expected would surely come, he would return to the East and Grace should become his wife. How many nights, lying by his lonely campfire, he dreamed of the happy days to come!

And now fortune had thrown the youthful lovers together again. How would it end?

Grace was trembling with excitement and delight as she ascended the hotel stairs with her mother.

"Who would have dreamed of such a thing!" she exclaimed, being unable to restrain herself till they were in their room. "Who would have dreamed of seeing Ford Webster here! It is such a jolly surprise. And how handsome he has grown! and how brave he is! and how easily he sent those two wretches hurrying off! It is perfectly delightful, mother!"

Mrs. Newman said nothing.

"Don't you think it delightful?" persisted the excited girl.

"I think it very fortunate he happened along just as he did. There is no telling to what an extreme those intoxicated men would have gone."

"Well, I gave one of them some scratches to remember me by, anyway."

When they entered their room they were surprised to find a large yellow envelope which had been thrust under the door. Mrs. Newman picked it up and found her name was written upon it:

"Now, who could have placed this there?" she mused, gazing in a puzzled manner at the handwriting.

"Open it, mother!" cried Grace. "Let's see what there is inside!"

The widow deliberately tore open the envelope, but her deliberation was a mask to her real feelings, for her hands trembled slightly.

From the envelope she drew two papers, one of which was crumpled and stained as if it had seen severe usage. The other was a common sheet of ledger paper, clean and neatly folded. Opening this, she found one side was covered with writing.

"It is for me!" she exclaimed, her voice sounding husky; "and written by a woman, I should say. But you can see to read it better than I, Grace. Let me hear it."

The girl took the sheet of paper and read aloud, as follows:

"MRS. GEORGE NEWMAN,

"Rightful Owner of the 'Blue Jeans' Mine;—

"DEAR MADAM:—

"With this I inclose a valuable document which proves your right as the sole owner of the Blue Jeans Mine. Your husband purchased the mine in your name, and it is thus recorded. I am well aware that the villain who calls himself Martin Wynder has formed and put into execution a scheme to rob you of your property, and I hope to be instrumental in his overthrow and ruin, for I hate him with an undying hatred. He is a bank-robber, bigamist, murderer—a dastard of the blackest die! He has wronged me in a manner that can never be repaired.

"I know not how this serpent succeeded, but in some way he crept into the good graces of Mr. Newman. He exercised a wonderful influence over your husband and led him on to ruin. But his claim that he purchased the mine is utterly false, as the accompanying paper will show, for George Newman could not sell what was not his. For all of this he holds possession, and he is resolved to make a desperate fight to retain the property if needs be. Nothing but vigorous vim will oust the rascal, and I advise you to lose no time in going for him as he deserves. Call an officer at once and have Wynder notified to abandon the mine. If he does not get out, enlist a force to back you, and take possession. This may seem a desperate thing for a woman to do, but it is just what you will have to do if you hope to obtain your rights.

"In conclusion, let me tell you of a thing I suspect—a thing of which I am nearly certain: I believe Martin Wynder is the man who shot your husband! In time, I hope to have proof of this, although there are enough other crimes of which he is guilty to hang him several times.

"Your unknown friend,
H. D."

It is impossible to describe the amazement created by this strange letter.

Mrs. Newman examined the other paper, and found it was a deed of the mine, which she really owned.

For more than an hour, mother and daughter discussed the situation, and then Mrs. Newman found herself quite overcome by excitement.

It was decided to summon an officer and have a notice served on Wynder without delay.

The necessary papers were made out in the hotel, and the notice was served before noon. Chris Comstock and Round-up Rube accompanied the city marshal to the office of the Blue Jeans. Wynder met them at the door.

Great was the daring schemer's rage when the contents of the paper in the marshal's hand was read to him.

"It is an infernal fraud!" he stormed. "It is an attempt to cheat me out of what is rightfully mine! But it will not succeed! My money purchased this mine, and I will hold it with armed men!"

"Oh, go fall on yerself!" sneered the bow-legged cowboy. "Your game is too thin ter work fer shucks! Ther hull town sees through it, an' you will fine two-thirds o' ther people are ag'in' ye. You'd best come off yer perch an' git out afore ye are hurt bad."

Wynder shook his fists at the cowboys.

"I knew you were my enemies as soon as I saw you!" he cried. "But you will find I am the worst man you ever tried to down! I will live to see you both buried!"

"If you do," put in Chris, "you will have to get out of Cinnabar very lively. Your days in this town are past, and your game has fallen through."

They turned away, leaving the man snarling and frothing like a mad-dog.

An hour later, Wynder appeared at the hotel and at once hastened up the stairs and knocked on the door of the room occupied by the widow and her daughter. Mrs. Newman answered the rap, but started back in alarm when she saw who her caller was.

Wynder bowed with mock courtesy, but there was a black look on his face.

"I do not care to come in," he declared, before the woman could speak. "I have called to see if you really mean to make an attempt to enforce your preposterous claim."

"I certainly do," was the calm reply.

The man laughed harshly.

"You are wasting your time. I have papers which prove my right to the claim."

"I doubt it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what you heard me say. I have a paper which proves my ownership of the mine, which has been duly recorded in my name."

"Do not try such a trick on me. There is no such a paper in existence."

"That is where you make a big error; it is in my possession."

"But your husband gave me a deed of the mine."

"If he did so it was without my consent or signature. I do not know as it was necessary to obtain either according to the law in this part of the country; but I do know he could not sell what he did not own."

"It is a plot to defraud and rob me!" cried Wynder, beginning to grow excited. "If Newman took my money when he did not own the mine, he cheated me like a villain!"

"Stop!" cried the voice of Grace, and the girl appeared at her mother's side, her face white with passion. "You need say nothing of the kind against my father! He was an honorable man, but it is plain he fell into the hands of a scoundrel. I do not believe you ever paid him a dollar for the Blue Jeans Mine!"

"It makes no difference what you believe, young lady. Your belief will not change the situation. I am not a man to be driven from what is rightfully mine, by two females!"

"You may find us more powerful than you think. We have some friends in Cinnabar, although we have been here but a short time."

"I care nothing for your friends. I hold possession of the mine, and I shall continue to hold it though it costs blood! If you persist, you shall rue the day you ever set foot in Cinnabar!"

With this threat, he turned and hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

WUN LUNG SHOWS HIS STUFF.

AS he rushed out at the door of the hotel, Wynder collided with the Chinaman, Wun Lung, who was coming in. Uttering a snarl, the mine-claimant drew back his clinched fist as if to strike the Celestial, but Wun Lung faced him without quailing or showing the least sign of fear.

"Bletter not hitee, lole bloy," he advised. "Stlikee Wun Lung gitee headee plunched. Chinaman velly blad chapee with dluks."

Something restrained the man, but he hissed:

"You know too much to live, you pig-tailed dog! I will see that your hash is cooked with the rest!"

"Melican man tlurn clookee, hey? Bletter not glo into washee blisness. Chinaman bleat lum all hollal if lum do. Bletter stlay in blank-bleakee business. Gleast sluccess in that line, lole bloy."

"I would like to know what you mean by that, you yellow-skinned imp of Satan!"

Wun Lung winked and grinned in a knowing manner.

"Melican man dlon't know what Chinaman meanee? Bly goll that velly flunny! 'Melican man gleat tlo gitee lound in the nightee. He flind way to gitee into blanks. Locke-lockee no glood tlo kleep lum out. Rakee in velly gleat bloodle. He! he! he!"

"He, he, he! you monkey-faced fool! You know too much to live long! You will suddenly die one of these days! Do you mind that?"

"Melican man bletter glo fall on lumself!"

Wynder fairly danced with fury.

"Go fall on myself!" he frothed. "If you were anything but what you are, I would punch your head!"

Wun Lung snickered.

"Heapee gleat plile lof flun! 'Melican actee like he was 'scaped fion loonerticky 'slyum."

Once more Wynder seemed on the point of striking the tantalizing Celestial, and once more Wun Lung faced him unflinchingly.

"You are too big a fool to know when to be frightened!"

"Melican man chlangee his mbind 'bout Wun Lung be flool plitee sloon. Wun Lung velly mluch smartee than lum thlinkee. He gitee stladdle 'Melican's neckee plitty quicke."

Wynder turned away, but seeing the two toughs, Mat Dolby and Pretty Pat approaching, he cried:

"Here, you fellows, make yourselves useful! Down this yellow cur for keeps, and I will pay you enough to keep you drunk for the next month!"

"Do you really mean it, boss?" asked Big Mat, spitting on his hands and keeping his eyes on the Chinaman.

"If yez do," added Pat, jerking off an old coat he always wore, and rolling up his sleeves, "we won't 'ave ser much as a grace spot av the crayther. It's doying Oi am to git at the loikes av him!"

Wynder glanced hastily around, and seeing no one in the immediate vicinity, he said, in a low tone:

"I mean it. Down him—kill him some way! I will pay you well. He seems nothing but a Heathen, but he knows too much to live. Pick a quarrel with him, and give him the length of a knife when you get a chance!"

"All right, boss."

"His goose is the same as cooked, Mither Wynder."

The Chinaman had overheard enough of this to catch the full meaning, still he retained his composure in a remarkable manner, and he did not even seem to look for a chance to escape. Such a chance there certainly was had he taken to his heels, though it is possible he might have been treacherously shot down by the two ruffians. Perhaps he knew this, and preferred to stand his ground for that reason.

"Velly blave 'Melican man!" he sneered, his eyes fastened on Wynder. "Him flaid lof Wun Lung, blire tlo toughee clustomers tlo finish Chinaman. That allee lightee. Wun Lung velly mluch able to tlake caree lof lumself."

"Down him, lads!" hissed Wynder. "Come to my office when you have done the job."

Then he left the hotel and hastened away.

Pretty Pat chuckled with villainous delight.

"An' now begorra we hiv got ye, Haythen! It's chewin' yez up we will be afther doin'. Do yez moind thot now?"

"Iliselman heapee flool!"

"Oh, yez hiv the garl to soay th' loikes av thit, hiv yez! Well, lit me tell yez a thing or two: you are th' fool, ye knave av th' worruld! It's an idiot yez made av yerself whit ye troied to buck ag'inst Pat Muldoon. Oi s'ld thin Oi'd

hiv it out av yer hoide, an' now Oi am about to k'ape me worrud."

"An' I'm goin' ter help him chaw ye up," nodded Big Mat, lifting one huge fist and surveying it. "Thar won't be nuthin' leif of ye arter I hit ye with this thing."

"Wun Lung dlon't want tlo gitee hitee with that."

"Ho, ho! So ye are jest beginnin' to realize the sitty washun ye are in! Ye're jest beginnin' to git skeered! Jest gittin' it through yer head thet ye're goin' ter be everlastin'ly chawed up! Wal, I don't wonder ye don't want to git hit with this batterin'-ram."

"No wantee glit hit. Chinaman cleanee now; glittee hit, then havee tlo glo washee lumself tlo glittee dlirt loff."

"Great howlin' thunder!" roared the chief, in amazement. "Did you hear thet, lard?"

"Begorra, Oi did!"

"Ther critter ther same as said thet my fist wuz dirty!"

"Thit's whut he did."

"Holy smoke!"

"Lit's go fer him!"

"All right. We're comin', you Chinees skunk!"

At this moment Chris Comstock stepped out of the hotel door and confronted the two ruffians.

"Hold hard here!" came sternly from the cowboy's lips. "I happened to overhear your intentions as expressed. So the two of you were about to jump the Chinaman. Well, I will let daylight through you if you try it!"

The toughs drew back with expressions of anger and dismay, enraged at being balked in their evil purpose.

But this did not suit Wun Lung.

"Velly mluch 'bligee tlo 'Melican man," he said. "Tloughee bloys dlunk; Chinaman lickee bloth lof lum."

"You don't mean you want to fight both of these roughs?"

Wun Lung nodded.

"That 'blout sizee lof it."

Chris was amazed.

"The two of them will kill you!" he exclaimed.

The Chinaman winked in a knowing manner.

"Wun Lung velly hard bloy to killee. Him knockee stuffin leut lof lum."

"But I cannot see you fight them both! If you must fight—and you are the first Chinaman I ever saw who insisted on such a thing!—take them one at a time."

The Celestial shook his head.

"Lickee bloth lof lum. They dlunk now; that not velly hard jobee."

"They will not give you a fair show."

"Tlakee my glun, slee flair show," and the huge pistol was extended toward the cowboy.

Chris laughed and shook his head.

"I am afraid I should kill all three of you if I used that," he said. "But I am ready to see fair play, as you call it, and I will use one of my own guns, if necessary. Still I think it is folly for you to encounter both of these toughs."

"Chinaman slow what made lof. Velly glood stuffy in Chinaman."

As the Celestial insisted on meeting the two ruffians, Chris stepped back, saying:

"All right, go ahead; but I shall keep my eyes peeled for crooked work, and if one of those dogs tries a crooked game, it will be the worse for him."

By this time quite a little crowd had assembled, Round-up Rube being among the number.

"Ef thet Chinees is a match fer them two skunks, I'll sw'ar he's er tiger from 'Wayback," said the bow-legged cowboy. "Anyhow, he's the dernedest quare Chinaman I ever sot my ole eyes on, an' thet's Gospel."

"Tloughee bloys allee leddy?" asked Wun Lung.

"You bet!"

"Waitin' fer yez."

"Lookee leut flor st'eam -injin!"

With a yell that sounded almost like the blast of a steam-whistle, Wun Lung charged at the ruffians, dodging from side to side in a singular manner that seemed to surprise his foes. Almost before they were aware of it he had dodged in between them. Then, with a sudden impulse, both sprung forward to grasp him—but he was not there. As a result, they collided.

"Hoop-la!" yelled the Celestial, kicking the feet of both men from under them and sending the toughs rolling in the dust locked fast in each other's arms.

"Velly gleat lof lof flun!"

The fallen rascals "unshackled" and started to scramble to their feet, but Wun Lung gave Big Mat a kick in the stomach that sent that

worthy rolling over and over, gasping for breath. Then the singular Chinaman turned his attention to Pretty Pat.

The Irishman was on his hands and knees in the act of arising to his feet. Wun Lung saw his opportunity, and improved it promptly, giving Pat a kick that sent him sprawling on his stomach again.

"Howly mither av Mowes!" howled the Irish tough. "If Oi iver git on me feet, Oi'll—Wugh!"

Once more he had struggled to his hands and knees, but it was only to receive another kick that caused him to plow a line in the dust with his nose.

"Hoop-la!" shouted the Chinaman once more. "How Irishman likee this flor change?"

Then he gave Pat another kick in the same place.

"Oh, great hoppin' Hannah!" roared Round-up Rube, his face crimson with laughter. "Hain't I glad I lived ter see this day! I never saw so much fun in all my life afore! This yere's er reglar jubilee picnic, an' thet blessed Chinaman is chief cook an' bottle-washer! Oh, thet is ther blamdest derned delightful Heathen I ever saw!"

Six times in all Wun Lung sent Pretty Pat sprawling before he decided to remain quiet and make no attempt to arise.

By that time Big Mat had recovered his breath and struggled to his feet. He made a rush for Wun Lung, and the Celestial whirled just in time to meet it. How he managed to avoid the shower of blows the big ruffian rained at him no one could say, but avoid them he did, and before long he found the chance to give Mat a "teller" exactly in the pit of the stomach.

That was enough.

It quite knocked the Chief of Cinnabar out.

But Pretty Pat was not satisfied, and he attempted to get in a blow at the back of Wun Lung's head.

It did not seem that the Chinaman was provided with more than one pair of eyes, yet he seemed to see Pat's movement without turning his head. Just as the Irishman drew back his fist to deliver the blow, the left foot of the Celestial shot out backward.

It was a kick that would have done credit to a contortionist, and it landed very nearly in the pit of Pat's stomach, sending him over flat on his back.

That was the end of the affair. A Chinaman had fairly whipped two of Cinnabar's worst toughs!

"Hooray fer Pig-tail!" bellowed Round-up Rube.

And the crowd of a rough and tough mining-camp actually cheered for a Celestial!

CHAPTER XIV.

A WRONGED WOMAN'S REVENGE.

FROM the hotel, Wynder hurried toward the Blue Jeans Mine, muttering as he went:

"What does that cursed Chinaman know? That is a question I cannot answer. It is plain that he knows something of the past, yet how is it possible? Never since I assumed the excellent disguise of Martin Wynder have I been connected with the Duncan Wort or Seth Lawson of the past. No, this is not true! I forgot the woman, or apparition, or whatever it was I saw last night. That thing seemed to know of my past. This Chinaman is not the fool he looks, for he knows of my record. Can it be he is—"

The man halted, his face turning white.

"If I thought so," he muttered, savagely, after a few moments of silence, "I would go back there and end his life myself. If I thought so, I would trust nothing to those half drunken fools. But it is hardly probable; I cannot have been trailed here."

He resumed his way to the mine.

"Things have reach a crisis; the tug of war is at hand. I knew it was coming, but I wished to put it off for a time. It has come sooner than I wished to have it. By to-morrow they will try to take the mine by force, but I shall be ready for them. I have sent Dustin after men; he will bring me some fellows who will fight like dogs for money. I will pay them well to stand by me."

"It is plain Mrs. Newman has obtained possession of that paper I sought for after Newman's death. How she secured it is more than I can tell. But she is only a woman! It is true those cowboys are her friends, but they are not smart enough to outwit Martin Wynder. A good part of the workmen will stand by me, I fancy, and those, with the ones Dustin brings, will be sufficient to stand off the whole town."

"I may be forced to make some kind of terms

with Mrs. Newman, but she shall not have a tenth part of what is hers—that is, unless she will marry me. It is too bad this stage of the affair arrived before I could play that card. I might have been a winner in an easy manner. But I will make the best of it."

"There is one thing I cannot understand, and that is what became of Royal's body. I had no further use for the fellow, and so I shot him through the head, as I did Newman. Newman's body was found, but Royal's was not—not even a trace of it. Is it possible that the vultures destroyed one and only mutilated the other? It does not seem so, yet what became of the other body?"

This was a question that seemed to perplex the villainous schemer.

"Well, both men are out of the way, anyhow. Hypnotism placed Newman in my power and led him on to doom. Little does his widow dream that letter in which he speaks of me as his partner was written when he was in a hypnotic trance and fully under my control. I had perfect command of his thoughts then, and he wrote exactly what I put into his mind. Ha! ha! ha! Hypnotism is a great thing! Had I been given plenty of time, I would have tried it on the widow. Being successful I could have compelled her to become my wife whether she wished to or not."

Reaching the office, he unlocked the door and entered, only pausing a moment to listen to the sound of the quartz-crusher, the mine being worked as if nothing unusual had happened.

"It is a pleasant sound," he chuckled. "Grinding out dollars for my pocket! Oh that—Thunder!"

The exclamation burst from his lips as he saw a figure appear before him—a veiled woman who arose from a chair in which she had been seated.

"Who in blazes are you, and how did you come in here? The door was locked!"

"Don't you know me?"

"If I could see your face, I might answer better."

"You want to see my face, Seth Lawson?"

The man recoiled as if struck a blow.

"Seth Lawson!" he hoarsely gasped.

"That is what I called you."

The veiled woman's voice was cold and metallic, and one of her hands was concealed in the folds of her dress. Wynder believed she clutched a revolver, and he was right.

"Are you a madwoman?" snarled the man.

"You must be! How did you get into this office? Why do you call me by the name of Lawson?"

"Was not Lawson one of your names in the past?"

"Never!"

"Liar!"

He took a step forward.

"Stop!" One free hand, concealed by a glove, was outthrust. "Stay where you are!"

Her words seemed to chain him in his tracks. There was something strangely familiar in that tone.

"Have a care, Seth Lawson!"

"Ah! You call me that again! Remove that veil—let me see your face!"

"Will you remove that false beard?"

He fell back, a look of fear filling his eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"I only asked you if you would remove that false beard you wear. That makes you Martin Wynder; without it, you would be Seth Lawson."

"Who is this Seth Lawson?"

"A bigamist—murderer!"

"Woman, do you know what you are saying?"

"Perfectly. Deny the charge if you can."

A desperate look came into the man's eyes.

"You know too much for your own good!" he snarled.

"I have not a doubt but you would murder me if you had a chance. The crime would be nothing new to you."

"Remove that veil, or I will tear it aside!"

"You are determined to see my face?"

"Yes."

"Then look!"

Quick as thought, the veil was snatched aside, revealing the pale and somewhat masculine face of a woman—a face that had evidently been handsome in the past.

Wynder reeled back, a gasping groan breaking from his lips, his hands pressed to his head.

"Hester Doyle—Great God!"

A bitter smile passed over the woman's face.

"Yes," she said, harshly, "Hester Doyle!"

"But she is dead—dead!"

"No, she lives—for revenge!"

It seemed as if the shaking man still believed himself confronted by a spirit, for his eyes were staring and his whole aspect one of abject terror.

"But—but," he gasped, "I killed her! She lay dead at my feet!"

"So you thought, but you made a botch of the job. She is alive, and she has come to square the score."

"Then you are not—a spirit?"

"No; I am flesh and blood—I am the woman you so bitterly wronged and then tried to murder! Now you do not deny you are Seth Lawson!"

He did not speak.

"What has become of your true wife?"

"She is dead."

"Another red stain on your hands!"

"No; she died a natural death."

"I can scarcely believe you speak the truth."

"I swear I do!"

"Anyway, she was killed by your wrongs to her. You married me while she was still living, and so our marriage was a sham. When I discovered you had another wife, you tried to put me out of the way."

"And I cannot understand how I failed."

"I was spared to bring your evil career to an end. You are still engaged in crooked work, and, as usual, your plots are against a woman. They shall end with this hour!"

"What would you do?"

"Kill you!"

The man's hand crept toward a weapon.

"Stop!" From the folds of the woman's dress came the revolver, and it was pointed straight at the cornered villain's heart. "You cannot get the weapon out quick enough."

A hunted look appeared in Wynder's eyes.

"Hold, woman!" he cried. "Do not make a fool of yourself! It can do you no good to kill me."

Again that harsh laugh came from her lips.

"You do not know me! Since I recovered from your attempt to end my life, it has been my one dream to obtain revenge. My time has come!"

"I will make all the reparation I possibly can."

"Nothing but your death will repair the wrong you have done me!"

"I will marry you—give you money—do anything!"

"You would kill me at the first opportunity!"

"No, no! I—"

"It is useless to promise. Prepare to die!"

He saw there was no escape, and uttering a snarl, he snatched at his own revolver.

Deliberately the wronged woman pulled the trigger. The revolver cracked, and Martin Wynder fell heavily to the floor!

For a moment the woman stood looking down at the result of her work, then she muttered:

"I shot him straight through the heart! Thus I am revenged!"

She returned the revolver to her pocket, concealed her face by the veil once more, and, with a last look at the motionless figure, passed out of the office.

CHAPTER XV.

WYNDER'S DEFIANCE.

BARELY had the door closed behind the woman when Martin Wynder stirred and sat up, a look of crafty satisfaction on his face.

"Fooled her!" he hissed, triumphantly. "I don't know how hard I am hit, but I am still very much alive."

He arose quickly to his feet and crept across the office, revolver in hand. Looking out at the window, he saw the revengeful woman walking away toward the camp. Swiftly he lifted the weapon and took aim at her back.

But he did not fire.

"No," he muttered, lowering the revolver and shaking his head. "I might miss, and I want to make sure of my work next time. I will let her go for the present, but she shall suffer for this little piece of work!"

"I felt her bullet strike me, but I do not feel any pain. I will see how hard I am hit."

An examination revealed the fact that blood had not been drawn. The bullet was imbedded in the handsome watch which very fortunately for him, the plotter had worn over his heart.

"The timepiece saved my life," he said, paling a little! "Her aim was not faulty, but the watch stopped the bullet. I felt the lead when it struck me. It seemed to deprive me of strength for an instant, and I fell to the floor. It is fortunate I had sense enough to keep still, for a second shot would have finished the job, without a doubt."

"But it is the most wonderful thing in the world that woman is living! I cannot under-

stand it, for I surely thought I had ended her life.

"I now understand about the second apparition I saw last night. It was this Nemesis. She played the trick very well, but I know not why my revolver failed to work. I searched for the weapon this morning, but could not find it. That glowing head I thought I saw in this room must have been a hallucination.

"It is well for me that woman's weapon did not carry a heavy ball, else the watch would not have stopped it. As it is, a good timepiece is ruined."

And he might have added a miserable life was saved.

Straight toward the Washington Hotel the woman avenger made her way, little dreaming the man she thought she had slain was unharmed.

Before she reached the hotel she came face to face with Cowboy Chris, and she made a signal for the young man to stop. He did so, wondering who she could be and what she wanted of him.

"I have a word to say to you," said the Nemesis, without lifting her veil. "You have been making preparations to oust Martin Wynder from the Blue Jeans Mine. Am I not right?"

Chris bowed.

"You are."

"You are working in the interest of Mrs. Newman and daughter?"

"I am."

"Well, if you will come to Mrs. Newman's room at the hotel in about ten minutes you will hear something of importance. Will you be there?"

"I will."

The woman bowed and went on.

"That is a lady I never met before," mused the young cowboy. "I wonder who she is."

Hester Doyle, to give her the name by which Martin Wynder had recognized her, proceeded directly to the room of the widow and her daughter. Mrs. Newman answered the knock.

"I trust you will pardon me," spoke the caller, "but I have something of importance to tell you. May I come in a moment?"

"Certainly," was the reply.

Hester Doyle accepted the chair which Grace placed for her, but she did not offer to lift her veil.

"I have come to speak about the Blue Jeans Mine," she declared, with abruptness.

Both mother and daughter looked at her inquiringly.

"You are contemplating taking possession of the mine by force, if necessary?"

"That is true," acknowledged Mrs. Newman.

"The letter you received this morning led you to such a move?"

"It did."

"I sent that letter."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Then you are our 'unknown friend'?"

"I am. I have been working for some time to complete the ruin of this man, and by good fortune I was able to obtain possession of that paper which I sent with the letter. I intended to work his ruin a little at a time, but, for a certain reason, I changed my plans and decided to end it all at once. Of course you understand I have a good reason for the hatred I feel toward this man—for I still hate him, though he is dead."

"Dead!" cried both the widow and her daughter in a breath.

"Yes, dead. He is forever past doing you further injury."

"This seemed almost incredible."

"Why, he was alive an hour ago!" fell from Mrs. Newman's lips.

"That is quite true, but none of us know what the next hour will bring forth. I am telling you the truth when I say Martin Wynder, your enemy, is dead."

"How did he die?"

"Much better than he deserved. He should have been hanged, but he died with a bullet in his heart."

"Who fired it?"

"I did!"

Mrs. Newman and Grace started back in horror, and a harsh laugh came from beneath the veil.

"You look at me as if I had done an awful thing," said Hester Doyle; "but you do not know how this man wronged me. It is a wonder I have restrained my hand as long as I have, for many an opportunity to slay the dastard has been mine. I only ended his life to-day to prevent more trouble and bloodshed, for I knew he

intended making a savage fight for the mine. If I delayed longer, he would have a score of ruffianly backers behind him. Once he tried to kill me, but I lived to destroy him. You should rejoice that the murderer of your husband is no more."

"Do you know this man killed my husband?"

"I do not know it; still I have little doubts about that. He put him out of the way to get possession of the mine."

At this moment there was another rap on the door, and Chris Comstock was admitted.

With a few words, Hester Doyle explained the situation.

"Now is the time to obtain possession of the mine," she said. "It is not best to wait till Wynder's friends learn of his death. I know you are interested in the welfare of these ladies, Mr. Comstock, and that is the reason why I asked you to come here. With Mrs. Newman's consent, you are the very one to take possession of the mine and hold it against the toughs who may try to drive you out. You have made friends with the better class in Cinnabar by the manner in which you whipped Big Mat."

Mrs. Newman was ready to consent to any move that appeared right, and plans were quickly formed for taking immediate possession of the mine.

A short time later, Chris was on the street, looking after his friends. It did not take him long to find those whom he sought, and soon five men moved toward the Blue Jeans Mine. They were Chris, Rube, Fresh Ford, Wun Lung and the Marshal of Cinnabar.

Wun Lung seemed "all broke up" when he heard Wynder was dead.

"Tlo bad!" he groaned. "Chinaman no gitee chance tlo give him black eye. Chinaman havee velly gleat gludge 'gainst that lole bloy."

When they came in sight of the buildings at the mouth of the shaft, they were surprised to see several men hurriedly enter the office.

"What does that mean?" exclaimed Fresh Ford.

"It looks as if Wynder's body had been found," said Chris.

"The report of the woman's pistol was probably heard."

"Thar wuzn't much show o' thet, 'less some galoot wuz 'roun' thet office," asserted Rube. "Ther crusher makes racket enough ter drown thet report o' er leetle pop-gun same as thet woman most likely kerried."

When they had approached nearer to the buildings, a man stepped out of the open office-door and hailed them. It was Big Mat, and he cried:

"W'at do you critters want sneakin' round hyer?"

"We have come to take possession of this mine," replied the young cowboy.

"Sho! You don't mean it!"

"We do."

"Wal, ye hain't goin' ter take it right off now, are ye?"

"That is our intention."

"Wal, your 'tention will git mightily stepped on. Martin Wynder hain't goin' ter guv up this yere mine ter-day."

"Martin Wynder no longer has a claim upon it. He is dead."

"That is where you are greatly mistaken," triumphantly cried Wynder himself, appearing at the door. "I was never more alive in all my life, as you will discover if you persist in bucking against me. I am in this mine to stay, and I defy all my enemies in Cinnabar to get me out. You fellows are barking up the wrong tree, and the sooner you take a tumble to yourselves the better off you will be. Now, you get out before we take a notion to riddle you with bullets!"

As if to add emphasis to the villain's words, some one within the office took a snap shot at Cowboy Chris, and the bullet knocked the young man's hat from his head.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DASTARD'S SHOT.

It would be difficult to depict the astonishment and disgust of Cowboy Chris and his friends, and their dismay must have afforded Martin Wynder infinite delight. Round-up Rube vented his feelings in no mild terms.

"Ther o'nery, no-count cuss hain't dead arter all, rot his hide!" grated the bow-legged cattleman. "It wuz all er blamed lie erbout his hev-in' passed over ther dead range! It wuz er game ter fool us."

"Are ye hurt, Pard Chris?"

"I am not touched at all," was the reply, as Chris picked up his hat. "Whoever fired that shot aimed a trifle too high."

"Ther next one may be lower," said Bruce, the marshal. "It would be prudent to move back a little ef we don't want ter git perforated."

"Wal, I'll hev one snap at ther chief cock o' ther roost," came through Rube's teeth, as he snatched out a weapon.

But Martin Wynder had been on the watch for such a move, and a single bound carried him through the doorway and out of sight.

From a place of safety, he yelled:

"Not this time, old man! I have a dose laid by for you. If you fellows know when you are well off, you will get out of range. In exactly thirty seconds I shall tell my men to open fire, and you will be riddled if you are within range. I mean business, so git!"

"It is the most sensible thing we can do just now," declared the marshal, and they all fell back.

Wun Lung was delighted.

"Chinaman glit at 'Melican man knockee leye lout! Wun Lung havee chance tlo plunchee velly blad 'Melican. Hitee him in headee makee him nosee bleedee. 'Melican whisker man flind Wun Lung blad bloy tlo slet him dlogees lon. Hel he! he!"

"This may be funny," admitted Rube; "but I fail ter see whar ther fun comes in. I don't cotton ter this yere kind o' er joke fer shucks!"

"That is because it is on us, probably," smiled Fresh Ford. "It is pretty certain Wynder considers it very laughable."

"But thet derved woman—"

"Told a falsehood," nodded Chris. "She seemed honest, but she must have been one of Wynder's tools. The man put up this job for the purpose of harassing us."

"Wal, it's our duty ter root him out o' thar, an' I propose we don't lose nary bit o' time in doin' it. Let's git arter him without losin' ary bit o' time."

"Just how are we going to do it?"

"Thet's ther question, pards," nodded the marshal. "How is it ter be did?"

"You can arrest him."

"For what?"

"We must find a charge."

Rube turned toward Bruce.

"Ef ye bed er warrant, w'u'd ye serve it?"

"I most certainly sh'u'd make the attempt. I hain't got any love fer this Wynder."

"Thet settles it! We'll fine some kind o' er charge, ur bu'st tryin'!"

"I have it!" exclaimed Chris. "I believe Wynder was the leader of the road-agents who stopped the stage yesterday, and I will swear out a warrant charging him with that crime. That will be enough to put him under arrest, and then it will not be difficult to take possession of the mine."

"Then come with me and sw'ar out ther warrant," said Bruce.

"The mine must be watched."

"Ther rest o' us will look arter thet," declared the bow-legged cowboy. "We'll jest camp down hyer, ur hyerabouts, an' keep our lookers out fer Wynder's movin'."

"Kleepee velly sharp watchee," grinned Wun Lung. "No letee lum glittee loff."

This being settled, Chris and Bruce departed, leaving the others on guard.

"I do not know as it was necessary to leave any one to watch Wynder," said Chris, as they moved along. "There is little danger of the man trying to slip away."

"He'll hole ter ther Blue Jeans ter ther last gasp."

"I don't know but it would be a good thing if he would get out. We have no use for him."

"Ther Chinaman seems ter want ter git at him pretty bad."

"Wun Lung is revengeful."

"He's ther derndest Chinaman ever I saw!"

"He is certainly a queer Heathen."

"Ther pig-tailed critter's smarter'n lightnin'!"

"Well, you have not made a mistake in that statement."

"Et must be he knew Wynder before he struck Cinnabar."

"I think so myself."

"Waal, I'll do my level best ter rake in Wynder fer road-ridin', an' I'll git him somehow. Ef he won't come down, I'll call on ther town ter back me. Then we'll git him ef we hev ter pull thet ranch down 'round his ears. But do ye really think he wuz one of ther critters as stopped ther hearse?"

"I do."

"Waal, road-agentin' is ernough ter hang er man in this yere part of ther kentry."

"But murder will hang him quicker!"

Chris and the marshal started at these words, and looked around. Directly behind them was

a ragged, white-bearded, vagabondish-looking man, who had evidently overheard their conversation.

"Good-day, gentlemen," said the stranger, touching the lopping brim of his old hat. "I happened to overhear some of your talk. You spoke of one Wynder?"

"We did."

"He is the man who holds possession of the Blue Jeans Mine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, he is a murderer."

"How do you know?"

"I saw him shoot a man."

"Who?"

"Was not George Newman, the former possessor of the Blue Jeans, found with a bullet through his head?"

"He was!" exclaimed Chris, excitedly. "And you saw Wynder do the deed? By heavens! this is the very evidence we want!"

"An' it hes come jest in time," nodded the marshal.

"Will you swear out a warrant charging Martin Wynder with murder?" asked the cowboy, trying to study the face of the old man, but getting very little satisfaction, as the stranger's features were almost concealed by his beard and drooping hat-brim.

"I will," was the prompt answer.

"That is enough!" cried Chris, with satisfaction. "You can go with Bruce, while I will inform Mrs. Newman her enemy still lives."

"An' ef ye git yer han's on thet other shemal," said Bruce, "jest make her explain w'at she meant by sech an infernal lie."

"I'll do it."

Chris turned toward the hotel, while the ragged stranger accompanied the marshal.

The cowboy's rap was answered by Grace, who greeted him pleasantly, her face eager with expectation.

"Mother has been quite overcome by the excitement," explained the girl. "Have you taken possession of the mine?"

"I regret to say we have not."

"Have not—why?"

"We found Martin Wynder still in possession."

"But—but—"

"He is not dead."

"Not dead?" cried Mrs. Newman, throwing back the curtain which had been arranged to hide the bed, and appearing. "That woman told—"

"A lie."

The amazement of the widow and her daughter was great.

"She seemed like a friend," faltered Mrs. Newman; "and she said she sent that paper."

"That also must have been a falsehood."

"But how did you know about it?"

"You forget that Wynder knew."

"And you think—?"

"She is one of the villain's tools—yes."

"It does not seem possible!"

"Where is she now?"

"She departed immediately after you left."

"Well, she is probably beyond our reach, but we hope soon to have Wynder in our grasp."

"How?"

"A man has appeared who has gone with Marshal Bruce to swear out a warrant charging Wynder with murder. Bruce will serve it immediately. As soon as the villain is under arrest it will not be a hard matter to take possession of the mine."

Mrs. Newman was not profuse with her thanks, but in a ladylike way she gave Chris to understand how much his kindness was appreciated. And when he had departed, she said to Grace:

"He is a noble young man, my child. He has the frankest, openest face I ever saw. If it were only he instead of Ford Webster!"

Chris was soon joined by the marshal and the ragged stranger. Quite a crowd followed them toward the Blue Jeans, it having been rumored that something unusual was about to take place.

Rue greeted them with the declaration that Wynder was still in the office, but he had received an addition to his force in the person of a small, dark-clothed man whose horse was still hitched not far from the office.

"If he does not receive a greater addition than that, we stand a good show of coming out at the top," smiled the younger cowboy.

Chris wished to accompany Bruce when he served the warrant, but the marshal would not consent.

"They will not dare harm me, for they know I have lots of friends," he said; "but some of them critters might take er notion ter putt a

bullet through ye. Ef I can't take Wynder alone, then I'll hev some one go 'long with me."

He boldly advanced toward the office, the warrant in his hand. When he was still some distance away, the door was thrown open, and Wynder appeared.

"Hold on there, Sam Bruce!" he cried.

"What do you want?"

"I am arter you, Martin Wynder," was the reply, as the marshal continued to advance.

"Halt, I say!" shouted the villain. "What do you want of me, Bruce?"

"I have a warrant here for your arrest."

"Well, you can't serve it to-day, for I decline to be arrested. If you don't chain up, one of my men will put a bullet through you!"

Still Bruce boldly advanced.

"You cursed fool!" shouted Wynder. "You'll get—"

His words were broken by the whip-like crack of a rifle, and, flinging up his arms, Sam Bruce fell heavily to the ground, treacherously shot down!

CHAPTER XVII.

A FATAL BLUNDER.

WHEN Hester Doyle had vanished, Wynder turned from the window, exclaiming:

"I will wager something, she goes direct to Mrs. Newman with the information that I am dead! If she does, there will be a crowd here to take possession of the mine before long. I must be prepared to receive them."

He hastened out of the office and entered the mine. In a short time he returned, accompanied by five rough-looking fellows.

"If you have to fight, I will pay you well," he declared. "Everything is on my side, and I shall come out triumphant in the end. Remember there will be big money in it if you are forced to fight. I am hourly expecting six good men from Wild Hog Bar, as I sent for them in the night. When they get here, I shall be ready to defy Cinnabar."

A few moments later, Pretty Pat and Mat Dolby appeared. They bore the marks of their encounter with Wun Lung.

"Did you kill that infernal Chinaman?" eagerly asked Wynder.

"Begorra, an' it's very near bein' killed ourselves we came!" as erted the Irishman. "Thit crayther is the very divvil on whales!"

"He is wuss then a wild cyclone!" growled Big Mat, rubbing his stomach.

"You don't mean to say he got away with you both?" shouted the mine-claimant, in surprise and disgust.

"Faith, an' thit's about the soize av it!"

"Well, you must have been asleep! I am ashamed of you! Why didn't you knife him?"

"It's thit Oi thought av dein', boss, but wan av thim cow-punchers stood ready to shoot at the soign av it, yez Honor."

Wynder's rage and contempt was unbounded, but he finally said:

"You can stay here. I expect a crowd from town to attempt taking the mine, and I am going to stand them off. You will add to our force, though I scarcely think you better than dummies."

It was not a great while before Chris Comstock and his companions appeared and were received in the manner already related. Wynder chuckled with evil satisfaction, as he saw the little party falling back.

"I fancy they will think it over a while before they come at us again," laughed the daring rascal. "It must be pretty plain to them all that Martin Wynder means business."

"Oi jist wish Oi hid shot a littler lower," declared Pretty Pat, who fired the shot at Chris. "Thit w'd hiv inded the loife av thit gallus young cock av a cow-puncher."

"Which might have been a bad thing for us," said Wynder. "I would like to see both of those cowboys put out of the way, but I don't care to have it done while they are trying to take the mine—unless it is absolutely necessary. If any one is shot, it may get us into hotter water than we care for at present. When the men from Wild Hog Bar arrive, I shall be ready for war."

"Nixt to the cow-puncher, Oi'd loike to put a bit av lead th'ough Sam Bruce," growled the Irishman. "It's niver a bit av love am Oi wastin' on th' loikes av him! Do yez moind thot now?"

Wynder paced nervously up and down the office.

"If Dustin would return," he muttered, glancing from the window at his enemies, who were discussing the situation. "I am beginning to

get nervous, for I believe those fellows mean business. They are not going to give over the attempt to take the mine."

"They're holdin' a pow-wow of some kind," said Mat. "How like thunder they must hev bin s'prised! It wuz 'bout ez much fun as I hev seen lately."

Wynder went to where a Winchester rifle was slung against the wall and took the weapon down. He examined it and found it was ready for use.

"If worse comes to worse," he observed, "this can be used very effectively."

Then he stood the weapon beside the window, where it would be handy in the time of need.

"They've kem ter some kind of a decision, boss," said Big Mat, who had been watching from the window. "Ther Chinees, ther bow-legged cow-puncher an' ther fresh hev stopped ahind, while ther marshal an' t'other cowboy's gone fer town."

Wynder knit his brows.

"I don't like that," he confessed. "It looks as if those fellows who have remained behind were left to watch until the others' return. If that is true, it must be they have decided on some scheme by which they hope to down me."

"Oi'd loike the foon av thryin' a pop at thim wid the roifle," asserted Pretty Pat. "Oi reckon Oi'd make thim move back a littler out av thot."

"It would not do," retorted Martin, shaking his head. "Where in the world is Dustin?"

It was not a great while before Dustin appeared, but, to the plotters' surprise and dismay, the bookkeeper was alone.

"Where are the men I sent you after?" cried Wynder. "Why have you returned alone?"

"The men are on their way, sir," was the reply. "They will be here soon. I am not much ahead of them."

The villain's face brightened at this information.

"I wish they were here now. The sooner they get along the better. We have already had some trouble."

Then he told the bookkeeper what had occurred.

"It is probable an attack will occur soon," he concluded. "Are you willing to remain here in the office and take your chances with the rest of us, Dustin?"

The young fellow hesitated an instant, then replied, firmly:

"I will remain."

Martin nodded with satisfaction.

"Good enough! You may not turn out to be such a coward after all, Dustin. You have done a good bit of work by riding to Wild Hog Bar, and you shall have the money I promised you. If you stand by me through the trouble which may come, I will pay you as much as I do these others, and your salary will be going on just the same."

"Thank you, sir."

Something caused Wynder to regard the meek young man in a puzzled manner. What was it that seemed so familiar about Howard Dustin's face and voice? If he could only get a good look at the eyes concealed behind the glasses, he fancied he could solve the mystery.

Dustin did not seem to like the close scrutiny, for he turned away.

"Oi say, boss."

"Well, Pat."

"They're comin'."

It was true. Chris, Bruce and the ragged stranger appeared, followed by quite a number of Cinnabar's citizens.

"Who is thet ole rag-bag?" asked Big Mat.

No one seemed to know the strange old man.

Pretty Pat's eyes glowed when he saw Marshal Bruce advance alone, and when the officer failed to stop at Wynder's command, the Irishman softly cocked the rifle.

"Begorra, Oi bel'ave Oi'll bore him!" he thought.

It happened that little attention was being paid Pat just then. Had it been otherwise, Sam Bruce might not have fallen before the fire of the murderous-minded ruffian.

When he saw the marshal absolutely refused to stop, the wretch lifted the rifle, took quick aim and fired, dropping the man instantly. But Marshal Bruce was not killed outright. He slowly arose to his feet and staggered toward his friends, crying:

"I've got it, pards—got it fer good!"

Before he could reach them, he fell again.

Cowboy Chris was quickly bending over the brave fellow, tearing aside the clothing to get a look at the wound.

"It's clean through my right lung," said Bruce, faintly. "It's a settler. P'r'aps you kin patch me up so I'll last tell you root them crit-

ters out of the nest. I'd like ter see ther imp thet shot me!"

"You shall see him if you live an hour!" came sternly from Chris Comstock's lips. "Somebody go for a medicine sharp. Pard Rube, see that every man in Cinnabar knows what has happened, and when you return, bring every man with you who is ready to see this dastard's work avenged."

Rube lost no time in obeying.

Wynder's rage and despair cannot be depicted.

"Oh, you fool!" he screamed, as he rushed into the office and seized Pretty Pat, shaking the Irishman till his teeth rattled. "Do you know what you have done? You have ruined everything! Bruce was the most popular man in Cinnabar. The very devil will be to pay now!"

"But the whip did not stop when yez told him. He would hix been afther arresthing yez in a minute more."

"Nothing of the kind. I would have stepped back into the office. If he entered, we would have taken him prisoner. Now, after what has happened, we shall have the whole of Cinnabar on us and have to fight like dogs!"

Some of the men looked frightened, for they were sensible enough to understand how serious the situation really was.

"Our only hope is in the arrival of the men from Wild Hog Bar," declared Wynder.

Preparations were made for a desperate battle, and these were scarcely finished when a sound of many voices was heard and a large crowd came hurrying out of the town, led by Round-up Rube.

"They're coming!" grated Wynder. "Every man stand to his post! Fight to the last gasp, for it means hanging if we are taken!"

The crowd only paused for a moment around the wounded marshal. With yells of fury, they charged toward the mine, weapons gleaming in their hands.

And at the very front were the two cowboys with Fresh Ford and Wun Lung.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STRUGGLE ENDS.

"I will have the life of that cursed cowboy!" viciously snarled Wynder, as he seized the rifle and took deliberate aim at Chris Comstock.

Before the weapon could be discharged it was dashed aside, and Howard Dustin leaped like a tiger upon the chief villain, shouting to the others:

"Help me secure this man! Do not resist the men of Cinnabar and you will not be harmed! Pretty Pat is the only one who needs to suffer. The rest have done nothing for which they will be punished. It will be madness to try to fight that crowd!"

With a howl of fury, Wynder tore at the small but strong white hands which had fastened upon him.

"A traitor!" he raved—"an infernal traitor! Down him, boys!"

Pretty Pat was the only one who offered to obey the command. The men seemed to understand the folly of the fight against the enraged citizens of Cinnabar, and even Big Mat was cowed. But the Irishman leaped forward and grasped Howard Dustin, who cried to the men:

"Help—help me, and I will stand by you when the men of Cinnabar come! I can save your necks!"

That was enough. In another moment the rough fellows precipitated themselves upon Wynder and the Irishman, resolved to do what they could to save themselves from lynching.

"Oh, you treacherous curs!" frothed the doomed villain, as he struggled like a madman. "I would like to kill you all!"

The struggle was useless; the two men were quickly overpowered, and the excited citizens who came bursting into the office found them helpless prisoners.

"Hold!" cried Howard Dustin, springing forward with uplifted hand, as the weapons of the mob were turned upon the men within the office.

"Do not shoot! We surrender!"

"That's whar your heads is level!" retorted Round-up Rube. "Ef ye hedn't, we'd blowed thunder outer ye!"

"Where is the man who shot Sam Bruce?" was the cry that went up, chilling the very heart's blood of the wretched Irishman.

"He is here, a helpless prisoner," was Dustin's reply. "I know the justice you will give him, and I hope you will serve in the same manner the man who brought him here; but before anything of the kind is done, I wish to make a revelation."

The crowd was clamorous for the blood of the

man who had shot Bruce, but, at the bookkeeper's entreaty, Chris, Rube and Ford did their best to restrain them for a time.

"Hullo, lole bloy!" grinned Wun Lung, as he bent over the chief plotter, whose schemes had been ruined at a blow. "Melican blank-leaker don't lookee velly well. Him feel velly blad. Allee tlied lup with stlings, s'posee him have these listers plut lon slee how kum likee that."

From a pocket the Chinaman produced a pair of handcuffs which he deliberately snapped on the man's wrists.

"Now Chinaman tlakee loff listers," he chuckled, and with very little trouble he removed Wynder's luxurious beard, which was thus proven false.

"I thlought slo, lole bloy," nodded the Celestial. "You are the chapee that clackee the Waterville blank and slootee clashiore. You gitee your neck stlatched flor that jobee."

"Curse you!" frothed Wynder. "You are a detective in disguise!"

"That is right, Duncan Wort," came from the lips of the one all Cinnabar had believed a Chinaman till that moment. "I am Spotter Scott, of the New England force. You have given me a tough chase, but I have run you down at last, and now you shall answer for your crimes. I would have arrested you when I first appeared in Cinnabar, but that beard was a really clever disguise, and I was not sure I had hit the right man. My face is one that can be easily made up as a Chinaman's."

"Wal," drawled Round-up Rube, "this 'splains a thing thet has bin er derved big puzzle ter me. I c'u'dn't understan' how thar c'u'd be er white Chineee with ther sand thet you hev got."

"I have the first claim on this man!" cried Howard Dustin. "He is mine!"

"Oh, you miserable traitor!" grated the unmasked villain, glaring at the bookkeeper. "To think I trusted you so and was thus deceived! I do not believe you went to Wild Hog Bar at all."

"You are right," was the reply. "I did not."

"I would like to get my hands at your throat!"

"But you never will, Seth Lawson."

"Ha! You call me that!"

"Yes, for that is your true name. You call me a traitor. I have good cause to be. I worked my way into your confidence for the purpose of ruining you. When you trusted me the most, I was the worst foe you had in existence."

"At times I have recognized something familiar about you," confessed the beaten rascal. "I have thought perhaps you were known to me in the past."

"You were right. Now do you know me?"

The glasses were removed, and the young man bent forward to fix a pair of burning eyes on the orbs of the one he had so deceived.

"Great God!"

"Ha! ha! You know me now!"

"Hester Doyle!"

"Right! I am the woman who tried to end your miserable life a short time ago. How I failed I cannot say, but now you are doomed. Now you understand why the cartridges in your revolver failed to explode. You often hung your coat in the office here, and yesterday I removed both revolvers, and fixed the weapons so they were useless."

The helpless man groaned with rage.

"The death-head you saw in this office was some of my work, done with a tiny magic lantern. It nearly frightened you out of your senses, as I hoped it would."

"You escaped my bullet, but I have brought you to your doom at last. You shall not escape now!"

The woman avenger snatched out a knife and bent over the man to deal a death-blow; but her hand was caught by the detective, and her purpose checked.

"You do not want his blood on your hands," said Scott. "Let the law dispose of him."

"I have a revelation to make," said the ragged stranger who had sworn out a warrant for the man of many names and many crimes. "I would like to ask this poor wretch a question. What became of the body of Prince Royal, the gambler?"

"I do not know."

"Well, I know!" asserted the ragged man. "I saw you shoot Prince Royal, and the warrant which I swore out charged you with his murder instead of the murder of George Newman. Prince Royal rests in the grave above which you caused a stone to be erected bearing George Newman's name!"

After a moment's pause, the old man continued.

"You do not understand this, do you? Well, I will explain. I saw you shoot Prince Royal, and I followed you clean to Cinnabar. Then I resolved to go back and bring in the body as evidence against you. I went back, but the vultures had been at work ahead of me, and the gambler's face was mutilated beyond recognition. A thought struck me. I stripped the body of its clothing and then attired it in the garments of George Newman, whom you believed you had also shot dead, but whose skull was not even fractured by your bullet. I placed the ring on the dead man's finger, where it was found. Then, to keep the vultures from further work, I watched till the searchers came and discovered the body. My scheme worked. It was thought George Newman was dead, but he still lived—and I am he!"

The old hat was thrown aside, and the false white beard removed. And in truth George Newman, alive and well, stood before the astonished crowd!

Pretty Pat received his just due, from the limb of a tree. With the exception of the chief rascal of the lot, Big Mat and the other men found in the office when the crowd broke in, were escorted to the border of the town and told to "git." They lost no time in doing so.

It would be folly to attempt to describe the scene which took place when Grace and her mother were brought face to face with George Newman. He was greeted as one risen from the dead, and the citizens of Cinnabar left them alone with their great joy.

It was a day of great excitement in the town, and the bars did a rushing business.

It was with the greatest difficulty, however, that the enraged citizens were prevented from serving the man they had known as "Martin Wynder" in the same manner as they had Pretty Pat. Marshal Bruce was still alive, but it was thought he could not survive long. In this, however, they were mistaken, for, despite the seriousness of the wound, a strong constitution brought the man through and he lived to do many a good service in the cause of justice.

Among those whom the citizens of Cinnabar delighted to honor were the two cowboys, Chris and Rube. Indeed, so much attention was paid them that the bow-legged cattleman said to his young pard:

"It's gittin' too hot fer comfut, Chris. Ther j'int's in my arm are nigh worn out fer ther han'-shakin's I hev got, an' ef this thing keeps on, I'll be hev'n' er drink inter me. Thet won't do, fer ye know w'en I gits started thar hain't sech a thing as stoppin'."

"Then I think it is about time we bade Cinnabar farewell."

"Me too."

They quietly said good-by to all their friends, and, despite all objections, rode away.

Gradually Mr. Newman lost his prejudice against Ford Webster, and the young man finally won Grace, and a worthy husband he made the admirable and courageous girl.

Spotter Scott carried his prisoner to the scene of his crime. The man was tried, found guilty and sentenced to be hanged.

During the trial a woman dressed in black and closely veiled attracted some attention by sitting as close to the prisoner as possible and watching him intently, but it was little dreamed she constantly grasped a loaded revolver with which she intended to end the villain's life if he should be acquitted.

With the end of the trial she disappeared, and what became of Hester Doyle it is impossible to say.

THE END.

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